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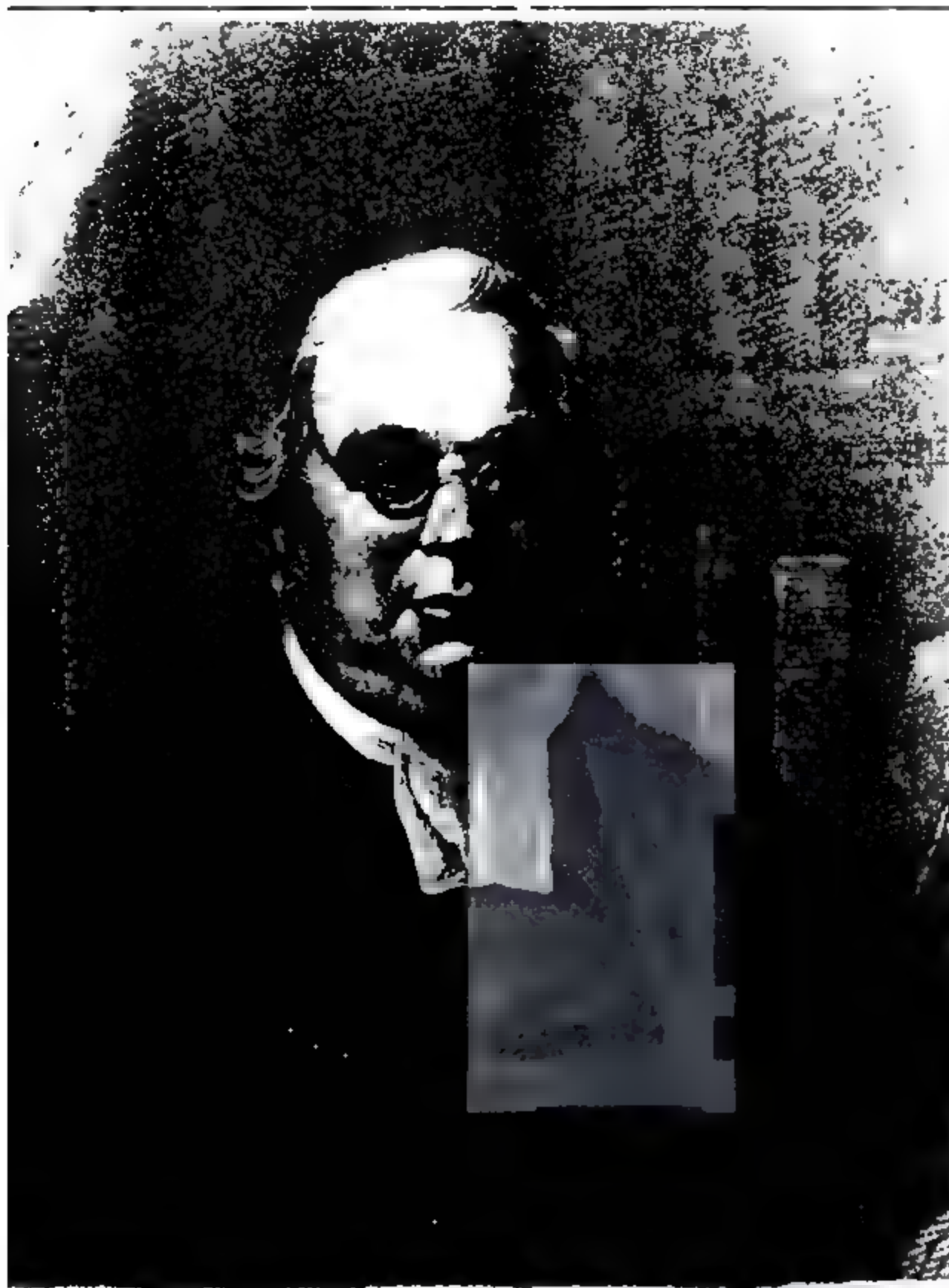
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A BRIEF NOTICE OF HIS POSTHUMOUS WORKS

AND

COPIOUS EXTRACTS FROM HIS DEAREST

TOGETHER WITH

LETTERS TO AND FROM HIS DEAREST

CORRESPONDENTS

BY JOHN WILKINSON

De mortuis, nil nisi verum.

It is absurd, in writing accounts of persons deceased, to be
flattering. The best men have their failings, and they ought
to be so, though it is proper to touch them with tenderness and
Mr. BELSHAM'S *Original Correspondence*.

REVINTY 1775

MEMOIRS

OF THE LATE

REVEREND THOMAS BELSHAM,

INCLUDING

A BRIEF NOTICE OF HIS PUBLISHED WORKS,

AND

COPIOUS EXTRACTS FROM HIS DIARY,

TOGETHER WITH

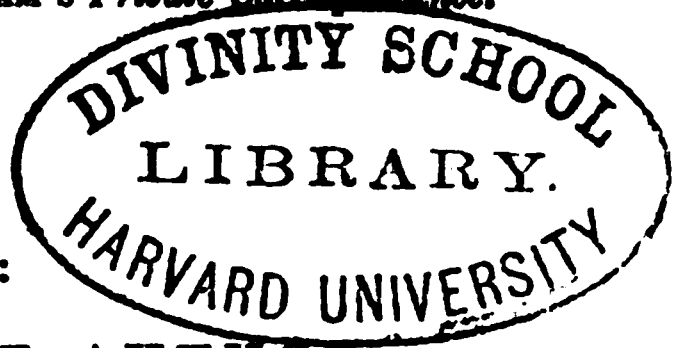
LETTERS TO AND FROM HIS FRIENDS AND
CORRESPONDENTS.

BY JOHN WILLIAMS.

De mortuis, nil nisi VERUM.

It seems to me absurd, in writing accounts of persons deceased, never to hint at their failings. The best men have their failings, and they ought not to be concealed, though it is proper to touch them with tenderness and delicacy.

Mr. BELSHAM's *Private Correspondence*.



LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR.

1833.

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MEMOIRS
OF THE
LATE REV. THOMAS BELSHAM.

THE Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM was born at Bedford, April 15, 1750, O. S. Of his paternal ancestry the writer of the present memoir is not able to furnish any detail. His father, the Rev. James Belsham, was a man of talent and literature, though by no means a popular or acceptable preacher. He was a good classical scholar, and the author of some Latin poems of considerable elegance and purity of diction. One, entitled "Mors triumphans," and another, "Canadia," were well known to many of his contemporaries. The following particulars of Mr. Belsham's maternal descent are from the pen of Miss Aikin, a lady connected with the family, and well known to the public by her *Memoirs of the Courts of Queen Elizabeth, and of James I.*

"The Rev. James Belsham married Anne, daughter of Mr. Woodward, brewer of Bedford, by a daughter of Sir Francis Wingate, Knight, of Harlington, Bedfordshire, and of the Lady Anne Annesley, daughter of Arthur, first earl of Anglesey of that name, who was lord privy seal under Charles II.,

and a distinguished leader of the Presbyterian party.*

“ At the time of his marriage and for some years afterwards, the Rev. James Belsham was settled as a minister at Bishop’s Stortford. On quitting this place he went with his family to reside at Bedford, which was ever after his home ; but during a part of that time he officiated at Newport Pagnel.

“ Mr. Woodward of Bedford was a leading man in that borough, and steadily exerted his influence in favour of the Whig interest and the house of Russell, a circumstance which, added to their mutual connexions, procured for the younger members of his family an early introduction to the notice of the principal families in that interest. In religion he was an Independent, with all the strictness of principle, and not a little of the austerity of manners, characteristic of the ancient Puritan. His high integrity, and the good sense and sagacity which he displayed in the ordinary affairs of life, gained for him general respect, and rendered him widely useful. He gave some sound advice and valuable assistance to Samuel Whitbread, the eminent London brewer, at his first entrance into life, which was never forgotten by that grateful and generous spirited man ; and thus was laid the foundation of that steady friendship which descended to a later generation, in the families of Whitbread and Belsham.”

This last observation is supported by the follow-

* An able vindication of the Earl of Anglesey may be seen in *Essays Philosophical, Historical, and Literary*, (Essay XVIII. p. 354,) in reply to Mr. Walpole’s observations on the character and conduct of that nobleman.

ing extract of a letter from the late Samuel Whitbread, Esq., to the Rev. Thomas Belsham, now before the writer, dated September 25, 1782 :
 “ There is no family I have a more earnest desire to serve and respect, than my late worthy friend Mr. Woodward, and all his connexions and descendants.”

Of the branches of this family, it may be sufficient to mention the following, as being more particularly connected with the subject of this memoir.

Anna Letitia, another daughter of Sir Francis Wingate, was married to the Rev. John Jennings, of Kibworth Harcourt, in Leicestershire, and in this line there was a farther and more intimate relation between Mr. Belsham's family and Mr. Whitbread's; for Arthur, son of the above John Jennings and Anna Letitia his wife, was united by a second marriage to Elizabeth, the sister of Samuel Whitbread, the elder, Esq., M. P.

Jane, the youngest daughter of Mr. Jennings, was married to John Aikin, D. D., of Warrington, father of the late John Aikin, M. D., of London, and of Anna Letitia, the wife of the Rev. Rochemont Barbauld.

Frances, daughter of Mr. Woodward, and sister to Mrs. James Belsham, was first married to the Rev. Samuel Sanderson, of Bedford, and afterwards to the Rev. Edward Pickard, of London.

Frances, the eldest of Mr. James Belsham's family, was married to Mr. Timothy Healey, of Berkhamstead, whose daughter Anne married Mr. T. Prentice.

Mary, his second daughter, married the Rev.

Robert King, D.D., afterwards Dean of Killala. The descendants of these daughters are the only representatives of the Rev. James Belsham's numerous family.

Only a very short period of early infancy was spent by the subject of this memoir under his father's roof. He was a pupil of the Rev. Dr. Aikin during the last year of that gentleman's residence at Kibworth, and afterwards was placed under the care of the Rev. John French, of Ware, in Hertfordshire. The following extract from Mr. Belsham's diary, where it occurs as late as the year 1806, contains his own account of this early part of life, his reflections upon it, and his judgment of the manner in which it had been employed, and of the persons with whom he was immediately connected :

“ Till 1757, I lived at home, went to a day-school, met with little indulgence, but much attention to health and instruction. From June 1757 to June 1758, I was at Kibworth under Dr. Aikin, and, for the time of life, it was a year of pleasure and improvement. From July 1758 to June 1762, I was at Wellingborough, under Mr. French, a time which I reflect upon with little satisfaction, having enjoyed little pleasure, and made little improvement. From July 1762 to August 1766, I was at Ware, having removed thither with Mr. French. If possible, less attention was paid to instruction here than at Wellingborough, and my time was deplorably and irrecoverably lost. Upon the whole, however, these four years have left a pleasant impression upon my mind. The scholars were numerous, and

the boys in general of good morals. I met with many agreeable companions, and formed friendships, which have been a pleasure and advantage through life."

Though Mr. Belsham reflects upon the time spent at Wellingborough and at Ware, as that in which he made "little improvement," it must be remembered, that the observation is recorded at a time when he would be apt to estimate his attainments too low, and to judge of them from his notions of what they might or ought to have been, rather than from what they were. Mr. French's school was in great repute; and there are yet remaining proofs, that he paid considerable attention to the progress of his pupils in learning, as well as to their moral conduct. The writer has received ample testimony of the merits of Mr. French, and of young Belsham's diligence and attainments, from one who shared in his respect and friendship through the whole course of his long and useful life. "In the beginning of the year 1764," observes Mr. William Smith, late M. P. for the city of Norwich, "I was placed, at eight years of age, with the highly-respectable Mr. French, who had recently taken the management of a Dissenting school at Ware. Here I found the late Mr. Belsham, six years older than myself, and, from his attainments and conduct, in high favour with his master. He was able, and proved himself willing, to afford me protection and encouragement, and to him, I believe, I owed the exceeding kindness which, for five years, I received from Mr. French. Mr. Belsham left Ware, I think in the year 1766, for Daventry, whither I followed

him in 1769, he being then in the fourth year of his course—so that our intercourse, before most friendly, and then renewed with additional advantage, lasted but a short time at either place, but was kept up by personal visits and epistolary correspondence, without interruption, or a single interval of coolness, during the remainder of his natural and intellectual life.”

My correspondent’s testimony to the good conduct of Mr. French’s pupils is highly creditable to the attention and vigilance of that gentleman, and to the moral discipline maintained in his seminary. “I think I can say,” continues Mr. Smith, “that I never heard an oath, or a flagrantly indecent expression, uttered by any boy during the five years of my continuance at Ware. I cannot refrain from adding my testimony, also, to the almost singular purity of conduct, as I fear, of the students at Daventry, especially considering their period of life, from sixteen to twenty-one.” It also appears at a subsequent period, when Mr. Belsham had entered on the office of the Christian ministry, and was invited to take charge of the congregation at Ware, that he retained a lively sense of the advantages he had enjoyed under the instruction of his kind preceptor. In his reply to Mr. French, through whom the application was made, he says, “I thank you, my dear Sir, for all the early attention and tenderness I experienced from you and Mrs. French, of which I shall ever retain a grateful remembrance, *dum memor ipse mei, dum spiritus hos regit artus.*”

It must have been here, and at home, during the short vacations of Midsummer and Christmas, un-

der the discipline and guidance of his parents, and more particularly under the watchful care and instruction of his excellent mother, that he was trained to that deep reverence of God, that habitual piety, and that watchfulness over his conduct and disposition, of which so many proofs are found in every page of his diary, even in the earliest parts of it.

The following letter, addressed by the Rev. James Belsham to his son, is evidence of his parental affection and solicitude, and also shews, that the pupil's time, under Mr. French's direction, was judiciously and properly employed.

“MY DEAR TOMMY,

“We were all very much pleased with your maps. I shewed them to several of our acquaintance, particularly Baron Mounteney,* who spoke much in commendation of your industry, and care, and taste. I was lately in the county of Wexford. I went in a noddy to bring back the Doctor (King) from Mr. Tottenham's. We breakfasted at a pretty market town, called Gorey, between Arklow and Wexford. You have not got that town in your map. But Bonus Bernardus non videt omnia, as the Proverbia say. When you make so good a breakfast as I did there, you will remember to put it into your next Map of Ireland. I breakfasted also at Arklow, which stands by the sea-side, but they seem to import nothing but ale; for it is a miserable town, and half the houses are ale-houses.

* Editor of Select Orations of Demosthenes, and afterwards one of the Barons of the Exchequer, in Ireland. For some account of him see Nichol's Literary Anecdotes of the 18th Century, Vol. II. p. 192.

“ I am engaged in a course of study, and seldom go out but for an hour or two in the evening. I heartily wish you and your brothers may make progress in every thing that is good. I hope you, and they, and your sisters, will be obedient to your grandpapa and dear mamma, and love and help one another all you can. You are growing up into a censorious world; your faults will be observed. I pray God, you and your brothers and sisters may be happy. My best love to your dear mamma. I hope you will all find in me, in every possible circumstance, a tender and affectionate father and true friend.

“ JAMES BELSHAM.

“ *Dublin, July 7, 1764.*”

In August, 1766, Mr. Belsham went to Daven-try, and was admitted into the Dissenting Academy, then under the superintendence of Dr. Ashworth, the successor of the pious and learned Doddridge, and remained there as a student till the year 1771. From this time, and during the whole of after life, he kept an exact and almost an uninterrupted account of the manner in which he passed his time—of his religious exercises—of his feelings and state of mind, when engaged in them—of his conduct and disposition—and of the most remarkable occurrences of his life. In these notices there is, of course, great sameness and repetition, often as to the words in which they are recorded; but they serve to shew the strict watchfulness which he maintained over himself—his own sense of his errors and failings, particularly of that warmth and

hastiness of temper to which he was subject—his strong desire of attaining a religious character, and of preserving and strengthening the good impressions which had been made upon his mind, often accompanied by expressions of unworthiness, which can only be attributed to the peculiar tenets in which he had been educated, and to the false views which he had taken of the condition of Man, and of the terms of acceptance with God, founded upon those Calvinistic notions, which he had imbibed from his infancy, and which, as they maintained an influence and predominance in his mind through a great portion of life, served greatly to depress his feelings, and to produce a sense of wretchedness and misery, which, at times, he could scarcely bear. Of this there will be sufficient evidence in the copious extracts from his diary, which will be presented to the reader.

The time which Mr. Belsham spent at Daventry, both as a student and as Assistant Tutor, previously to his settlement with any congregation in the capacity of a minister, was an important period of his life. Here, doubtless, he laid the foundation of that knowledge which he afterwards acquired, and of those habits of application and diligence for which he was so remarkable; and here, as already observed, he cultivated and exercised that self-examination and watchfulness, which contributed so much to the formation and improvement of his character.

The following memorandum is copied from a paper without a date, on one part of which is inscribed a kind of diagram, exhibiting the occupations of the day and of the week. It is evident, however, that it must have been written some time in the

autumn of 1766, when Mr. Belsham had entered the seventeenth year of his age; and it shews that his mind was deeply imbued with religious principles, though mixed with sentiments of that dark and melancholy kind, which gave a mournful character to his thoughts and expressions, and greatly embittered the period which is usually the most cheerful, the most animated, and the most active, portion of human life.

After stating that he came from Welford to Daventry to meet his father, and that through the mercy of God he had arrived in safety, he observes: “My temper of mind, I hope, has been in some measure serious to-day. In the morning private devotions I was very short, and, I fear, not so earnest as I ought to be; in family devotions much distracted; in the evening sermon I hope I was pretty much affected, as also in private devotions, especially in the evening; but in family prayers I have been thoughtless indeed; I hardly had my attention fixed for one minute all the while, and through the day I have had very few heart-affecting thoughts of God. I am, indeed, all over corrupt. Alas! what will become of me? O that I could but serve God with diligence and fervency, with zeal and alacrity! but my convictions soon wear off, and I fear my conscience is seared with a red hot iron.”—“My state of mind through this week has been variable. Sometimes I am, at least I think myself to be, pretty deeply affected with divine things, but at other times I am quite hardened. Sometimes I have some hope that God will adopt me, notwithstanding my unworthiness—at other

times I am ready to sit down in hopeless despair. My convictions, I hope, are pretty frequent, but all very transient, and I much fear, that Christ is not formed in my soul. O that I might be made a willing subject in the day of his power ! O that he would receive me into the number of his elect !”

On a similar slip of paper, also without a date, but which must be referred to the same period, he expresses himself as follows :

“ I hope I have had some pretty deep convictions this month ; but I fear I have too often resisted the Holy Spirit. Sometimes I have been ready to hope, yea, am almost confident, that I have the favour of God, and that he is my friend. At other times I am just ready to fall into despair—and I cannot tell how it is that I do not. My chief difficulties are concerning foreknowledge and election. I am ready to fear that God has not elected me, and that I am irrevocably doomed to everlasting misery. These thoughts sometimes make me so (unhappy) that I can scarcely endure myself. My life is a burden to me, and I am almost ready to blaspheme the God of heaven. But Jesus knows the way I take, and I hope will pity me.”

“ This is the close of the year. What reason have I to put up my Ebenezer and say, ‘ Hitherto the Lord hath helped me’ ! What abundant cause to say, ‘ He crowneth the year with his goodness’ ! ‘ Verily, all his paths have dropped fatness.’ Last summer I left school. I had been at a boarding-school nine years ; and a kind providence continually attended me, and suffered no evil to befall me, but loaded me with favours every succeeding year.

This providence has now brought me to Daventry ; and I hope that God has now made me sincerely willing to devote myself to him in the important office of the ministry. I hope I do it with a view to his glory, and the good of the souls of my fellow-creatures ; and I trust that I am desirous ‘ not to count my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy.’ My affairs wore a very gloomy aspect, when I first came here ; but, gracious God ! thou hast brought light out of darkness, and hast not only placed me above my expectations, but even above my warmest wishes. What shall I, what can I render to thy name for all thy innumerable benefits towards me, an unworthy worm ? ‘ Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name, and forget not all, nor any of his benefits.’ It is he who is my Creator, my Preserver, my unwearied Benefactor. It is he, also, who gave me friends, and health, and food, and raiment, and every thing that makes life easy and pleasant ; but, above all,

“ ‘ Twas he, my soul, that sent his Son
To die for crimes which thou hast done ;
He owns the ransom, and forgives
The hourly follies of our lives.’ ”

WATTS.

The subsequent extract is denominated a Review of 1766, and is subjoined to the preceding one :

—“ I have this year had many repeated calls, which I hope, through divine grace bestowed upon me, a miserable sinner, I have not entirely neglected ; for when I compare my present temper of mind with what it was at the beginning of the year, I trust that I am improved in religion ; but I would

speak it with the greatest humility. I know my own weakness, and readiness to fall into sin. It is through the grace of God I am what I am ; and I trust his grace, who hath said, ‘ I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.’ He is able, and, I hope, willing to deliver me from the hands of all my enemies ; and, though I am weak, ‘ his grace is sufficient for me.’ I have had some thoughts of attending the Lord’s table. O that I may see my way clear to it ! I would count it my highest honour to be permitted to approach it. O that he would remove all those fears, those doubts and scruples, that lie in the way to it. He knows them all. He knows the way that I take. When he has tried me may I come forth as gold.”

“ Many of my acquaintance have died this year. May it put me in mind of my own mortality. May it teach me the frailty and shortness of life, the certainty of death, and the necessity of preparing for another and a better world. ‘ There the sun shall no more go down, nor the moon withdraw herself ; for the Lord shall be our everlasting light, and the days of mourning shall be ended.’ O that I may at length arrive at those peaceful shores ; ‘ there the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.’ All I ask in the name, and for the sake of that good Shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep. To him, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be eternal praises. Amen.”

The following is a copy of a paper preserved by Mr. Belsham with great care, with some others of a similar description, which he frequently reviewed, and upon which he has made his own observations

at separate times. It will be particularly interesting to the reader as the record of very early impressions, and of his feelings and sentiments upon the occasion to which he refers. He had copied and signed the abridged form of self-dedication recommended in Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, (Chap. xvii.,) which he considered as a solemn engagement on his part to fulfil the conditions of it, and his observing that engagement as the ground upon which alone he could hope that God would be to him a covenant God and Saviour. To this he subjoined the following Meditation :

‘ “ HOSANNA ! to the Son of David ! ’

“ On Saturday the 28th of February, 1767, after much deliberation, and many doubts and fears, I at length, by God's assistance, determined, ‘ that whatever others did, I would serve the Lord ; ’ and I hope that I did, in the sincerity and uprightness of my heart, devote myself to the Lord in an everlasting covenant never to be forgotten. I had frequently thought of it before ; but I was afraid that I should not do it with sincerity ; and I was under great apprehensions of the wrath of God, if I should fail in the least instance, after I had made the covenant. But adored be the mercy of a kind and gracious God, that I was enabled at length to break through every obstacle, and that Satan was no longer suffered to keep me back. Many things concurred to invite me to do it at this time. It was the day before the sacrament, which I thought was the most proper to be set apart for this important work. I was greatly encouraged in it by a sermon that Mr.

Ashworth preached the day before, from Psalm cxvi. 16: ‘O Lord! truly I am thy servant, and the son of thine hand-maid; thou hast loosed my bonds.’ I hope, that in the dedication of myself to God I had right views. As far as I can judge of my own heart, it was with a view to be delivered from the bondage of sin, under which ‘I have groaned, and now groan, being burdened.’ I hope I did it that I might be strong in grace, that I might more easily resist temptation, under a sense of the vows of God, which are upon me. But still I confess I am under some doubts. I fear that I did not do it with so much earnestness, cheerfulness, and willingness as I ought; yet I know I have a God who compassionates my infirmities. ‘He knows my frame, he remembers that I am but dust;’ and I hope he pities me, as a tender father pitieth his child, who is desirous of serving him, but is incapable on account of weakness and infirmity. The time I chose for this solemn purpose was between the devotional lecture* and dinner.

* On the Saturday preceding the administration of the Lord’s Supper, the usual business of the Academy was suspended, and the presiding Tutor delivered an address to the students, generally containing some advice or directions for the attainment of a religious character, or some admonitions of the nature of the office which, as candidates for the Christian ministry, they were preparing to assume; of the duties connected with it, and the qualifications which were necessary to the due discharge of them. This was called the devotional lecture. It had been the practice of Dr. Doddridge, and also of his predecessor and tutor, the Rev. John Jennings, of Kibworth, to avail themselves of such opportunities of communicating some important religious instruction to the youth committed to their care. This practice was continued by Mr. Belsham, and the reader will meet with frequent allusions to this service in subsequent extracts from the Diary.

When I first entered into my closet, which was a little before twelve o'clock, I reviewed my notes of the discourse, and prayed over them, and begged, I hope earnestly, of God to assist me in the great work which I intended to perform. After that, I walked to and fro in my closet, endeavouring to summon up my courage, and to conquer my fears; and then, after reading over the form of self-dedication, and Doddridge's exhortation to it, I prayed upon my knees, I hope with earnestness and importunity, that I might have every doubt removed, and that I might be enabled to give up myself unto God with sincerity and truth, and that I might not dare to mock him with the mere outward ceremony. After this I rose from my knees, and after meditating a few minutes, I took the form in my hand, and with fear and trembling knelt down again, and did at length begin to read it. O that I could say that I read it ardently, and that my whole soul was in every sentence; but I hope I can say, that I desired it might be so; and that I was grieved that I was no more affected. When I had finished reading it I signed my name, and rose up from the ground and read the 116th Psalm, 2nd part, of Dr. Watts's Psalms, and meditated for a few minutes, and then was called down to dinner.—Though I was not so earnest as I could wish, while I was reading over the form of self-dedication, yet I hope that I felt an inward satisfaction after the duty was over;—a joy to think that I had devoted myself to God, to be his for ever. I am unworthy of this honour, I know, but Jesus died that I might live. It is in him alone I trust. Through him I

hope that my feeble services will be accepted, and all my sins be forgiven. I hope he will give me strength to maintain my ground against all the opposition I may meet with from earth or hell, and that he will at length receive me into those heavenly mansions where I shall be free from all these sins, and all these infirmities which will, in spite of myself, attend me here.

There shall I see his face, and never, never sin ;
There, from the rivers of his grace, drink endless pleasure in.

“ I am determined by divine grace to review this solemn dedication of myself to God, if it is convenient, the first sabbath in every month, excepting when such seasons as this recur, which I would rather choose for that purpose. I would likewise do it, if possible, on New-year’s day, and on my birth-day, and at other convenient seasons. And O ! may I have grace given me to live according to it, ever remembering ‘ that I am not my own, but bought with a price.’ Lord, I know that I cannot do these things of myself. I am sensible of my own weakness. But nothing is too hard for God. I hope I can appeal to him as to the uprightness of my intentions in dedicating myself to him ; and I earnestly pray, that he will be my covenant God and Father, and that ‘ he will never leave me nor forsake me.’ I hope his spirit will teach me the way of duty and enable me to walk in it. This is the surest way to happiness. ‘ And now unto him that is able to keep me from falling, and to present me faultless before the presence of his glory, to the only wise God, my saviour, be glory and

honour, dominion and power, for ever and ever. Amen and amen.' ”

— “ Saturday, Jan. 16, 1768, seven o'clock, A. M.—I have now been renewing my solemn covenant engagements with God. It has been, through grace, a comfortable and delightful season to me. It took me about an hour and a half. How delightfully do such hours pass on as are spent in the service of God ! I do not remember any season in which I have been more alive, and hope, that though my affections were not so much engaged as I have sometimes felt them, yet that I was serious, earnest, and sincere. I was afraid at first that it would have been otherwise ; but I called upon God and he answered me. He attended to the voice of my supplication and sent down his spirit to assist me. O what encouragement to trust in him for futurity ! I have given myself up unto him. I have been much affected at the thought how little I have regarded my former covenant engagements ; and I have been pretty large in my confession, and hope that I would not only confess but forsake my sin. I have resolved ‘ to go and sin no more ; ’ but I rely entirely on the strength of Christ and his grace for the keeping of this resolution. I know, and have often experienced, the treachery of my own deceitful heart. I will not, therefore, trust to it, but to him who hath said, ‘ My grace is sufficient for thee.’ I will, therefore, like the apostle, ‘ glory in my infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.’ I hope that I shall be enabled to live so as to make an approach to the table of the Lord, comfortable. I hope that this will be

soon. I hope my God will remove my fears, and every other obstruction ; that he will gently clear my way to it, and make my attendance upon it refreshing and delightful. Into his hands I again commit myself and all my concerns, for time and eternity. ‘ I am thine, save me, for I have sought thy precepts.’ ”

In these religious exercises, in which Mr. Belsham was accustomed to engage, the reader will remark much to admire and commend. The strong and ardent desire which he manifested to cultivate devotional feelings and habits ; his earnest aspiration after an interest in the favour of God, and meetness for the enjoyment of it ; his professions of sincerity ; his ingenuous and penitent acknowledgment of sin ; his desire to be preserved from temptation, and his solemn resolutions to guard against it ; his humble, but repeated and earnest prayers for divine assistance and grace ; his desire and care not to rely upon his own strength and resolution ; and his dependence upon the presence and blessing of God, must be considered as the means by which his character was formed, and by which he attained that steady regard to God and duty, and that habitual sense of his government and providence, which distinguished him through every period of a long and eventful life. But it will also be seen, that the foundation of his piety and devotedness to God was distinct from any peculiar doctrines which characterised his creed, and that as far as these had any influence, and certainly they had a decided influence, upon his views and feelings, they served to produce that apprehension and fear, that despondency and

dejection of mind, which greatly deprived him of the comfort of those exercises, and were one cause of that reluctance which he often felt to engage in them, and for which he frequently and severely reproached himself.—That whatever was excellent in his character and conduct was produced by the use of these means will not be questioned; but that these would have been equally laudable, and that his comfort and happiness would have been much greater, had the period of early life been guided by those principles and views which he adopted in the close of it, cannot be doubted. Juster sentiments of religion must have had a better effect. His devotion would have been more pure; his piety would have been more rational; his mental satisfaction would have been more steady and permanent; and the pleasures of his religious services would have been of a higher cast: and though his feelings might not have been so intense and vivid as those which he sometimes experienced, they would not have been less delightful because they were more equable; and he certainly would have been relieved from some of those painful sensations, which proved a sad alloy to his enjoyments, even long after the cause of them had ceased to exist.

The following documents, though long, are too important to be omitted, and as they are followed by Mr. Belsham's own reflections at a remote period, any comment of the present writer's would be superfluous. The reader will recollect, that Mr. Belsham had expressed a desire and intention to attend the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

“Daventry, March 5th, 1768.—I have at length,

through the riches of divine grace, notwithstanding the many, very many discouragements I have met with from the world, the corruptions of my own heart, and the inveterate malice of Satan, been enabled to apply to Dr. Ashworth to be admitted to communion with his church. I went to him and asked him, if he had leisure to converse with me for a few minutes. I sat down, but could not say any thing, and burst into tears. The Doctor then asked me, whether I was in communion with his church. I told him I was not. He asked me, whether I desired it. I said I did. He told me he was exceedingly glad of it, and asked me, whether I had thought of it a long time. I said I had ; but had been prevented from speaking of it before, because I was afraid of profaning the ordinance by an unworthy attendance upon it. He then told me, that he thought people erred on the right hand and on the left with regard to this institution ; some thinking it little more than any other duty, while others counted it so solemn a thing, that they thought they must needs be perfect in order to a proper attendance upon it ; that he thought that none but those who had a principle of religion in them might attend upon it, but that the weakness of their graces was no objection. It was made with a design to strengthen our faith, our hope, our love, and every other grace ; that we were all unworthy of it, but our unworthiness did not profane the ordinance. I said to him, that it was my desire to attend upon it with a view to the improvement of my graces. He then asked me whether I could give any account at what time I began to receive religious impressions.

I told him I could not remember any time when I had not some convictions, as could hardly fail to be the case with one who had enjoyed so many advantages as I had done. He said, it was to be sure an unspeakable advantage to have a good education. He added, it had always been his custom to desire his young people, though not to impose it upon them as a condition, to give a general account of the dealings of God towards them, especially if they had had any thing remarkable in their circumstances, in order to satisfy his people of their right to be admitted, and that they might come in the most honourable manner, so as to leave no room to doubt of their uprightness, and the truth of their profession. He desired that I would write a short account of my experience, and thought I might do that with greater freedom than I could speak, and told me he would propose me to-morrow with all his heart. He knew his people would approve of it, and he would take some other opportunity of conversing with me. I then went away.

“ I do not remember any day in which I have been so entirely taken up in devotional exercises as this, and I hope it has been both very useful and very comfortable to me. I was at first under very great doubts and difficulties with regard to being proposed at the sacrament. The discourse I had last night with Mr. Fenner (a fellow-student) was very discouraging, and much weakened my resolution. I had, indeed, almost determined that I would not be proposed. But in my distress I called upon God, when I could scarcely believe him mine. He heard me, and answered my feeble, imperfect peti-

tions. I prayed again and again that I might be directed in which way to go. I thought much upon it, and was at length by divine grace enabled, in some good measure, to see my call to it, and applied to Dr. Ashworth, as I have mentioned above. When I came from him I kneeled down and prayed to God for strength and encouragement, and that he would complete the work he had so graciously, so kindly begun. I was in a pretty cheerful frame for the rest of the evening, particularly at my private devotions, and was more free and more affected at the society* than I ever was before; and I was still more affected in a short meditation, just before I went to bed. Indeed, the mercies of this day had been so great, and so unspeakably above what I expected, that it all seemed a dream. I could not tell how to believe it. O what astonishing love to permit such a poor, unworthy creature as I am to come in view of the sacred table! I was much afraid that I should have been discouraged, and that I should repent of what I had done; but, blessed be God, that was very far from being the case; and I am so far from repenting of it, that the more I think of it the more joy I feel, and the more pleasure results from the view of my conduct. ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name.’”

“Sunday, March 6.—In my private devotions this morning I was comfortable indeed. Never do I remember feeling so great, so calm, so triumphant, and so pure, a joy. I spent nearly an hour, which

* Probably a private meeting of some of the students on Saturday evening to converse on religious subjects.

seemed to pass away so swiftly, that when I was obliged to go down at the monitor's call, it appeared as if I had not been a quarter of an hour in my closet. My heart, blessed be God, overflowed with love, and, like Peter, I thought it 'good for me to be there;' and, O, I could have wished never to come down to this tempting world any more. I then saw what need there was of patience, not only in order to bear the difficulties, the trials, the afflictions, the temptations, of life; but also to wait with cheerfulness for the heavenly inheritance. All my soul, as it were, rose to God, and I found myself so comfortable and so happy in the enjoyment of the Divine presence, that I could hardly persuade myself to depart. It was 'a joy unspeakable and full of glory.' The goodness of God was so heightened by the lively views I had of my own unworthiness, that I was quite transported out of myself, and lost in the contemplation of the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of that unfathomable abyss. I had a clear and affecting view of his kindness in permitting me to approach his table, and the tempter was not permitted to suggest hardly one discouraging thought; though quickly after I found my frame sinking, and I had some of the same discouragements I before met with, though, blessed be God, in nothing near so discouraging a degree. I cannot say, at present, I am under such lively views and hopes. 'A messenger of Satan is sent to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.' But I doubt not that all is ordered in wisdom and love. I have found it so hitherto, and I do not question but that goodness which has

brought me thus far, will conduct me safely and comfortably to the close of this important affair in which I am now engaged, and not only that, but to the end of life. Wise are all his ways.”

“ Evening.—I have this day, after many doubts and fears, and inward conflicts, been proposed to the communion of Dr. Ashworth’s church. About noon I was under much doubt and discouragement, but I was unspeakably refreshed by those most suitable words, which darted through my mind: ‘ Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage; he shall strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.’ I bless God I can say I have waited on him. I have most earnestly entreated his direction and assistance, and have chosen that which seemed to me to be the way of my duty, notwithstanding the very many obstacles and discouragements that lay in my way; and, adored be his goodness, he hath not left me comfortless. No; I have found him strengthening my heart, when I was ready to be overwhelmed with sorrow. I have some remains of doubt now, but, upon the whole, I thank my God, I can say I reflect with pleasure on the part I have acted, and my heart glows with gratitude and love to that kind and gracious God, whose consolations have so delighted my soul, in the midst of all my troubled thoughts within me. And I will trust in him for the future. I will wait upon him and endeavour to be of good courage; and I know he will not forsake the work of his hand, but will, I firmly believe, order all things in infinite wisdom and goodness, not suffering me to be tempted above what I am able to bear; and I hope that he will give

me a happy issue out of all my trials, and will graciously complete the work which he has so kindly begun, and hitherto carried on in a manner so unexpectedly above what I expected.”

“ April 28th.—I have been to-day, in general, in a serious frame, and have received much comfort from that Scripture, ‘ He brought me to his banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love.’ In the afternoon I was chiefly meditating, as I was to pray in the family in the evening. The interval between prayer and supper was employed in transcribing my experience. After supper, for about half an hour, I was meditating and praying in my closet, and then went down to converse with Dr. Ashworth. He asked me if I went on comfortably. I told him, better than I expected. He then asked me for the account of my experience, which I gave him, and he read it, making here and there a pious reflection. We afterwards conversed for three quarters of an hour. I told him I was ready to doubt my own sincerity, on account of my irresolution. He said it was the case with most Christians: we were fickle, inconstant creatures. I said, that I did not think I loved the Lord Jesus Christ enough to come to his table. Come then, said he, that you may love him more. He then began to discourse on love to Christ. There were two kinds of love, the one loving him for his excellencies, the other arose from a sense of what he had done for us; that we were so selfish that we could not love him in the first sense; that our love to him consisted chiefly in thankfulness, arising from considering the misery we were in, the sufferings which Christ en-

dured, and the cheerfulness with which he endured them. We were not to expect an assurance of an interest in Christ, and of our love to him at first, but by degrees; that imperfections and failings would naturally produce doubts; that when we loved Christ perfectly, we should know that we did, and should not then entertain any doubts; because, that when a man loved Christ with all his heart and soul, he must certainly know that he did love him so. The discourse then turned to considering how comfortable and how improving a thing it was to spend our sabbaths and our seasons of devotion in a proper manner; and how gracious an institution it was; for without these longer seasons of worship, spending an hour or two in a day in religious exercises would not make impressions upon our minds sufficiently deep and lasting. When we had talked thus for some time, we concluded with prayer, in which I was much affected, as the Doctor prayed over my case in a very particular manner. Upon the whole, the season was comfortable. I had much more liberty of speech than I expected, and, I may say, much more affection too, though, alas! I had too little, and was frequently troubled with wandering, trifling thoughts. Just before I went away the Doctor gave me some directions; told me what questions he should ask me, &c., and so our conference ended.”

“An account of my experience, which I delivered to Dr. Ashworth, April 28th, 1768.

“Having enjoyed the unspeakable privilege of a religious education, (for which I can never be sufficiently thankful,) I have had convictions from my

infancy, and cannot remember the time when serious impressions were first made upon my mind. But these early impressions soon wore off, and passed away 'as the morning cloud, or the early dews.' Yet through the Divine goodness they have been frequently repeated, sometimes by hearing awakening sermons; sometimes by reading books of devotion; at other times by private admonition, or the sickness or death of friends. I particularly remember that I was a good deal affected with a sermon of my uncle Sanderson's, about four years ago, from those words, Psa. cxvi. 16: 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid;' and was especially impressed with the private conversation which I had with him afterwards on that subject; and a very little while after I was much affected with hearing Mr. Orton's sermons on eternity; and Dr. Watts' sermon from those words, 'Whether life or death, all are yours,' which Mr. French used to read in his family on Sabbath-day evenings. But that which struck me most of all was the death of one of my companions, with whom I had contracted a very intimate friendship. All these circumstances concurring pretty nearly at the same time, were, I think, the means used by divine grace to awaken my soul to more affecting thoughts of death and eternity, and to a more serious and earnest concern to prepare for them than I ever had before. From that time, I hope that my sense of religion has not been entirely lost, though it has sometimes been very weak and languishing, and is, alas! too much so still.

“Since I came to this place, I have sat with much pleasure, and I hope improvement, under Dr. Ashworth’s ministry. I was particularly affected with those sermons of his, from John iii. 7, 8 : ‘Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again,’ &c. ; and, likewise, with those from 1 Pet. i. 3—8 : ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,’ &c. ; and with another from Rom. vii. 23, 24 : ‘But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind,’ &c. ; and many others, which I might mention. I have gained much advantage from reading good books, particularly Dr. Doddridge’s *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, and Dr. Evans’s *Christian Temper*. But I have never found myself improved by any thing more than by serious conversation with those persons to whom I could open my heart freely, and I have generally found that impressions made upon my mind by this means, have been deeper and more lasting than almost any thing else. I have been frequently advised, and have for a considerable time had many thoughts of entering into the communion of the church ; but I have been till now discouraged for fear, lest I should not be sufficiently prepared for sitting down at the table of the Lord ; and lest, if I should afterwards fall into sin, there would be no place for repentance. But having read Dr. Doddridge’s sermon on the subject, I found my objections so fully answered, and was so well convinced, that if there was a principle of grace in me

at all, it was my duty to attend at this ordinance, notwithstanding the religious principle might be very weak, and attended with many imperfections and infirmities, that I dare not keep away any longer. I hope that it is my sincere desire in attending upon it, to evidence the sincerity of my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world; my hearty acceptance of him as my Saviour; my entire submission to his disposing will, and my readiness to obey all his commands, depending upon his spirit for assistance in the discharge of every duty, and upon his merits for my acceptance at the great day of account. Indeed, when I consider the strength of indwelling sin, and the influence which temptations have over me, I am much afraid lest I should have judged of myself more favourably than I ought, and am not without some fears, lest, after all my professions of religion, I should at last be cast away; but I trust that by waiting upon the Lord at these seasons, I shall renew my strength; and that, being quickened and animated by the contemplation of my Redeemer's dying love, I shall be enabled to go on my way rejoicing: 'to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint.'—THOMAS BELSHAM."

"April 29th.—This was the preparation day. I spent most of my time, after half-past eleven o'clock, A. M., in devotional exercises. I found myself through the greater part of the day in a serious frame of spirit, both in social and private devotions, though not a very affectionate one, nor so fervent as I could wish. But after meeting, in the afternoon, when meditating and praying, contemplating

the Divine love and compassion to me, and my rebellious and ungrateful carriage, comparing the state in which I was, with that in which I might have been, I found myself overcome. I was melted into love ; and I could freely and without reserve say, ‘ Lord, here I am ; do with me as seemeth good in thy sight.’ This comfortable and delightful frame lasted while I drank tea with Mr. Fuller (the assistant tutor). We conversed much together, and I found myself greatly affected, still keeping in view the love, the infinite love of Christ, and my own unworthiness and guilt. In family prayer I was in the same comfortable frame, though I think rather lower. In private devotions my joys were very high. I poured out my soul with great freedom of speech, and laid open my whole heart before the Lord. O ! it was a comfortable, a most delightful season. Why, ah ! why was it so short and transient ? A little after I went to supper ; I found this tender, affectionate frame much abated, and quite worn out by the time we returned. I sat with Mr. Fuller for about an hour ; we had a good deal of discourse together, and yet I could not, with all my labour and pains, bring back my heart into that comfortable frame which it was in before ; though I hope I was serious and earnest. I could not recover it before I went to bed, but still remained in a peaceful, resigned frame, and hope I was as much resolved for God in my cooler moments as when my affections were at the highest. Yes, I will trust in him, though he see fit to withdraw his face. I hope the cloud will quickly pass over, that he will soon shine out again upon me

with redoubled strength, and that ‘when he brings me to his banqueting-house, his banner over me will be love.’ ”

The following day preceded the Sabbath on which the Lord’s Supper was to be administered, and Mr. Belsham, consistently with his previous declaration, considered this as a proper time for repeating the serious and deliberate dedication of himself to God, preparatory to his partaking of this ordinance. The record which he has made of this transaction is much in the style of his observations on the former occasion ; and in describing his sentiments and feelings he manifests the like seriousness and piety, the same humble acknowledgment of imperfection, and the same fear and apprehension of increasing his guilt and condemnation by falling afterwards into sin ; but added to this is the expression of great pleasure in the expectation of attending at the table of the Lord, and in the religious exercises preparatory to it.

The reader will have many opportunities of observing the effect upon Mr. Belsham’s mind, and will often sympathise with him under the distress and despondency which were created by an imaginary deficiency in the duties which he imposed upon himself, and in the want of that religious feeling, of that lively faith, and of that perfection of character, which he persuaded himself belonged to one who had entered into such a solemn engagement, and ought to have been attained by him. In the same degree in which these expectations were unfounded, the reproach with which he afflicted himself was unreasonable and unjust ; and nothing can point

out more strongly than this, the great error of erecting a standard of human excellence depending upon the excited state of the passions and affections. The love which Christianity enjoins is to shew itself by obedience, and not in the effervescence of feelings, which a thousand contingencies may elevate or depress.

The great seriousness which pervades Dr. Doddridge's work, from which Mr. Belsham took this form of self-dedication, the evident sincerity with which it is written, the devotional spirit which it breathes, and the obviously strong desire which it exhibits to promote the salvation of men, made it very popular; and it was put into the hands of almost all young persons who were seriously disposed. But notwithstanding the high estimation in which it was then, and is still, held by many, it may justly be doubted whether it be suitable to the circumstances of youth who, from the first dawn of reason, "have been trained up in the way in which they should go," and who, by the care and watchfulness and judicious instruction of pious and affectionate parents or guardians, have had their minds early impressed with the leading truths of religion, and have been taught to entertain and cherish a just reverence for God, an habitual sense of his universal presence, confidence in his wise and righteous government, and to regard him as the witness and judge of all their conduct. The ingenuous mind of a young man could scarcely admit that great sinfulness and depravity which are ascribed to human nature; and, if kept from any association with persons of his own age, of neglected education

and bad morals, and if he have been under the guidance and instruction of teachers of this self-condemning creed, it must often lead, as in the case of Mr. Belsham, to unreasonable self-reproach, and to the use of expressions of moral turpitude, and of corresponding humiliation and penitence, for which the character and conduct present no real cause.

Mr. Belsham's feelings and convictions of this uncertain and depressing cast appear to have remained unchanged for a long series of years. This form of self-dedication he frequently reviewed and repeated, and at the foot of the copy which he had made with his own hand, is the following declaration :

“ With a thankful heart I once more, after a long interval, renew this solemn covenant engagement, and set my name to it, in token of my cordial, cheerful acceptance of it, and resolution, in dependence upon divine grace, to comply with the terms of it, this 26th day of April, 1781, being my birth-day, and now entering upon the 32d year of my age, being 14 years since I first solemnly entered into this sacred bond.”

The following observations, also subjoined to the same copy, will shew Mr. Belsham's opinion and judgment thirty years afterwards, when he had discarded the tenets of the reformer of Geneva, which had gained such an ascendancy over the early period of his life :

“ Lord's-day evening, Oct. 27, 1811.—I have no doubt that I performed these religious exercises with great seriousness, simplicity, and sincerity ; but I much doubt the propriety and the prudence of

them. In the business, the avocations, and the temptations of life, it is impossible to maintain that perfection of character which is professed in these forms ; and the recollection of these solemn, formal obligations, so often renewed, and so often violated, has a tendency either to harden the mind, or to throw it into despair. The Scriptures nowhere require these solemn and explicit promises, and Dr. Doddridge ought not to have laid that great stress upon them which he has done in his popular treatise on the Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul. It has too much the appearance of will-worship, and is productive of little real benefit.”

The following extract will put the reader in possession of Mr. Belsham’s state of mind after he had been admitted to the Lord’s table :

“ Sunday, May 1, 1768, past six in the evening. It is done ! the great transaction is done ; and I hope too I can add, though not with the assurance, not with the comfort I could wish, ‘ I am my Lord’s, and he is mine.’ I was this day admitted into Dr. Ashworth’s church ; I have reason to be thankful for this, on many accounts, and reason to be very much humbled about it too. I have reason to be thankful that I felt myself so much supported, that I did not at all regard my being in such public view. I have reason to be thankful that I found my affections at all engaged, that I could see any thing of my own unworthiness, and my interest in the love of God, through a dear Redeemer. I have reason to be thankful, that I could in any measure discern my love to God and to Jesus ; and that I had any thing of a comfortable season, and was not

utterly sunk into despair. O my Lord ! thou hast been very kind to me ; yes, much, much kinder to me than I deserve. It might have been an ordinance of terror. I might have ‘eaten and drank damnation to myself;’ but I thank God for any hope that this was not the case.

“ ‘ Yet, oh ! it swells my sorrows high,
To see my blessed Jesus frown.’

“ I have indeed much cause for humiliation on many accounts. First, on account of my pride, my spiritual pride. In the vestry, I own, I attended to what the Doctor said of me with a disposition of mind which the great Searcher of hearts cannot approve. I was too anxious to gain the applause of men, and had too great solicitude to appear well in their eyes. I have great reason also to be exceedingly humbled on account of my vain and wandering thoughts, that I could not keep my heart fixed on Jesus. I have some reason to lament my irreverence for the ordinance, and the want of that solemnity of mind which is becoming so sacred an institution. I have great reason to lament, and never to open my mouth any more, because of the coldness and deadness of my affections towards God and my Redeemer. I have reason to weep and mourn, as a good man once did, because I cannot get this vile heart to love Jesus. There was another reason, too, for which it was wise and good in God to deprive me of the comfort I expected, and that was, that I expected too much from the ordinance, and thought myself sure of receiving much comfort in attendance upon it, and therefore did not depend

upon, and look unto God, so earnestly as I ought to have done; he therefore justly withdrew his face to let me see that he was not confined to certain particular methods and rules of conduct, and that all my comfort was derived from him, and that without him even the most solemn ordinances, and those external forms which seem best adapted to give consolation and refreshment, were but a carcase without a soul. Upon the whole, therefore, I have reason to admire and adore the Divine conduct towards me, in that God has not left me quite comfortless, yet has acted in such a manner towards me, as to shew his displeasure at my sins and follies, without discouraging me too much.

“ ‘ So fathers their young sons chastise,
With gentle hands and melting eyes ; .
The children weep beneath the smart,
And move the pity of their heart.’

WATTS.

“ Oh ! I have reason to say, that it has been good for me that I have waited upon God. A day spent in thy courts, O my God ! even in such circumstances as I was in, is better than a thousand elsewhere. I desire, O my Father, my gracious, tender Parent, for so I must, I will call thee, to learn instruction from thy gentle reproofs ; to learn humility ; to see more and more of my own nothingness ; and that all my dependence is upon thee.

“ And now, O my soul, consider, seriously and attentively consider, what an awful transaction thou hast been performing. Thou hast been engaging in the most solemn and public manner to be the Lord’s. Thou hast been devoting thyself unto God. Thou hast been making resolutions against

sin, and not against this or that particular one, but against all sin, every sin, even that which does so easily beset thee, which is dearer to thee than a right eye, which appears more necessary than a right hand. Yes, I have resolved against that, and against that with a peculiar solemnity; I even made a particular resolution against that which I feel cleaving so fast unto me. I have been taking hold of the covenant of grace. It is not, O, it is not a light matter. No; I have been either eating and drinking to the aggravation of my own damnation, or to the comfort and support of my soul, and to the promoting of my eternal interests. There is no medium. And, blessed be God, the latter is, I hope, the case with me. What manner of person, then, ought I to be: I, who have devoted myself unto God! O! I desire to live as one who knows that 'he is not his own, but bought with a price.' May the life which I now live be with faith in the Son of God. O that I may be more resolved against sin! O may I be more frequently thinking of the vows of God which are upon me, and be endeavouring to live as one in such circumstances ought to do: never to yield to sin in the least degree, never to set my affections, in an inordinate degree, on any earthly good, but to have my conversation in heaven; to walk more by faith and less by sight. May it be my determination 'to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified,' and may I daily be increasing in love to him, and shew my love by obeying his commandments, and, in particular, that of loving his people, my brethren. And, O may the blessed spirit of God assist me;

may he comfort me ; may he say unto my soul, ‘ I am thy salvation ; I am thy strength and thy shield ;’ and fighting under the banners of the Captain of salvation, may I come off conqueror, yea, more than conqueror, over all my innumerable foes ! I trust in his strength. I desire daily to see more and more of my own weakness and insufficiency, of myself, to do any thing of myself. I will trust my soul and all my concerns, both temporal and spiritual, into his hands, to be disposed of as he thinks fit. I hope he will guide me by his counsels through this wilderness world, and that he will be frequently turning his face towards me, to comfort me till the day, the eternal day, dawn upon me, and these shadows for ever flee away. Then may it be my happy lot to spend a whole eternity in contemplating the love, and in singing the praises, of my Redeemer. ‘ But, oh ! eternity’s too short, to utter half his praise.’

“ I was very serious and affectionate in the review of my conduct afterwards, and do not remember that I ever enjoyed such comfort in devotion in my life. I may truly say, that ‘ before I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Aminadab.’ I expected to have had a very mournful, uncomfortable season ; but he, my dear Redeemer,

“ ‘ He saw me faint, and o’er my head
The banners of his love he spread.’

And I had such evident views of his love to me, and of my interest in him, that I was filled with joy and peace in believing. Unto him, with the

Father, and the Spirit, be everlasting praises. Amen.”

Appended to the papers from which these extracts have been made, are the following remarks, dated October 28th, 1811 :

“In these papers, which I believe to be the faithful transcript of my feelings upon the occasions on which they were written, it is curious to observe the distraction of the mind, and the difficulty which the writer experienced in ascertaining the proper share of homage which was to be paid to the Father and to the Son. It is plain, however, that if the Father received the tribute of homage and fear, the Son possessed that of confidence and love. The Holy Spirit is seldom mentioned, though no doubt was then entertained of his personality, and almost equality to the Father and the Son ; for I believe at no time did I ever express a full conviction of the perfect equality of the Son and the Spirit with the Father, at least, not after I had been some months at the Academy ; till which time my belief in the Assembly’s Catechism was perfectly blind and passive, and without having had the least intimation that any persons, called Christians, thought differently.

“I believe these very long-protracted, and often fatiguing devotional exercises, though they trenched grievously upon my studies, and prevented my reading books which would have communicated information or improved me in learning, were a very excellent preparative for that earnest, anxious inquiry after truth, which eventually terminated in

that consistent, delightful, and, I trust, correct system of opinions in theology and morals, which is the solace of my advanced years.”

The observation in the former part of these remarks does not so strictly apply to this document as to some others, and perhaps is more properly descriptive of the general state of Mr. Belsham's mind in reference to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, than of any particular expression of it in these extracts. The confused and indistinct notions of the peculiar homage due to each of the persons of the Trinity, and the conflicting sense of reverence, obligation, and gratitude appropriate to each, is probably the general feeling of those who imagine this doctrine to be an article of their creed, and who have not paid much attention to the foundation on which it rests. But it is obvious, that the affections which ought to be in lively exercise in the contemplation of the Divine nature and perfections cannot be so sublime and awful, nor the sense of obligation and duty be so deep and powerful, when they are divided, as when all excellence and goodness are ascribed to one Being, the object of all religious worship and obedience, who alone is entitled to the reverence, the gratitude, and love of his rational, dependent, and accountable creatures, receiving from him every blessing which they enjoy, and every good which they hope for and desire, both as to this life and that which is to come. The simplicity of that faith which regards only One supreme, almighty, perfectly wise and good Being, gives distinctness, clearness, and dignity, to it, which not only afford presumptive evidence that it

is correct and well founded, but render it influential, vital, and practical.

No doubt Mr. Belsham was sincere. But it may be justly questioned whether there were not some degree of self-deception or imposition in these recorded services. The language is evidently that which a young man in his circumstances would be apt to use as the phraseology of the party to which he belonged, without very nicely distinguishing its meaning. It is surely possible to preserve a sense of the presence and agency of God, of his unbounded goodness and love, of his government and providence, of man's accountableness and dependence, of the necessity and advantage of revelation, of the blessings of the gospel, and of the gratitude, affection, and obedience which are due to Christ, as the messenger of grace and truth, without that self-crimination, which arises almost entirely from a misapplication of the language of Scripture, referring to man without the advantage of revealed religion, and strictly applicable to the moral condition of the Heathens, or those in a Christian community, who live without God, and without hope in the world. Nor is it surprising that, after so much excitement, Mr. Belsham should complain that his feelings were not permanent, and that his frame of mind, and even the exercises of devotion themselves, were cold and lifeless. Certain it is, there is great danger of mistaking the forms of religion for religion itself; when it must be allowed by all that they are only the means, and, as they are here described, will be regarded by many as not the best or most effectual means, of acquiring the true spirit of devotion and

piety. How different is the representation which the Apostle gives “ of pure and undefiled religion before God, even the Father : to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” ! James i. 27.

The following extract further shews the state of Mr. Belsham’s mind, his religious opinions, and his views when his judgment was more matured, and when it may be supposed that the sentiments to which he gave expression were those which he adopted from inquiry and conviction ; though even at this period it must be understood, that he had not entered regularly on the study and investigation of those controverted doctrines which formed a part of his creed. The language, the writer presumes, is that which was common at the time among professors of the sect or denomination to which Mr. Belsham attached himself, and with which he was connected by education and principle. How far it may be familiar to persons of the same description in the present day, he has no means of judging. But though it has no pretence to elegance or correctness, it indicates a regard to his state and condition as a religious professor, highly creditable to himself, and which must be respected and admired even by those who think, as Mr. Belsham himself afterwards did, that his opinions were unfounded, and the source of much of that apprehension and distress which pressed so heavily upon his mind.

“ June 1st, 1769.—I have observed of late that I have been rather on the decline in religion, and that temptations to many sinful actions have been too prevalent in my breast: and, moreover, the vacation

being very near, I set apart a few hours this morning for self-examination, humiliation for sin, and for the renewal of my covenant engagements with God, and committing myself to him, with a peculiar reference to the approaching vacation. And I trust I can say, through the good hand of God upon me, it has neither been an unpleasant nor an unuseful opportunity to me. I could not, indeed, bring myself to that lively sense of my guilt and folly which I wished to do ; yet I hope I did sincerely mourn over it, and most cordially resolved, in the strength of divine grace, to be more watchful for the future ; not to throw myself in the way of temptation, and to be more resolute when obliged to encounter it. I hope I was sincere, likewise, in the dedication of myself to God, and was encouraged in the prospect of the ministerial work, to which I hope I am called, and for which I am preparing.

“ After breakfast I was serious and much enlarged in prayer, which I offered up in respect to the temptations and the duties of the ensuing vacation. I prayed, and I hope I shall not forget it, but endeavour that my conduct may answer to my prayer—I prayed for grace to keep me from levity, from idleness, from uncharitableness, and from pride. I was earnestly desirous that I might be filled with benevolence, and that I might have grace to add ‘ the wisdom of the serpent to the innocence of the dove ;’—that I might behave well to my parents, to my brothers and sisters, my relations and acquaintance. I was serious and comfortable in this prayer, and I trust it will not be entirely in vain. But, alas ! I know it will be to no purpose

to pray, if I do not likewise add watchfulness to it. This is the thing that I am so tempted to neglect ; and this it is that has been the occasion of my past miscarriage—my not adding watchfulness to prayer. God grant that, since I see my danger, I may be enabled to guard against it, and, being forewarned, may also be forearmed. I would not think that there is any charm in acts of devotion that will certainly keep me from falling into sin ; but I desire to remember the fresh obligations I have been now laying myself under to a religious life, and being sensible of those greater aggravations of guilt, which will by this means attend me, if I should ever fall again into those sins, those odious sins, which I have now been resolving against, I would be more upon my guard than ever, and trusting in the almighty strength of the great Captain of my salvation, I will march on,

‘ ——— nor fear to win the day,
Though death and hell obstruct the way.’ ”

“ Sunday evening, July 2d. Sacrament day.—Gal. ii. 20. ‘ The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.’—Yes, my soul, remember and impress it deeply upon thy mind ; engrave it upon thy memory as with a pen of iron, or the point of a diamond, the Son of God was crucified—was crucified for thee. So great was his love ! Draw near, O my soul, and contemplate with a little more than ordinary attention the wonderful sight. The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me ! The Son of God ! What does this imply ? Who was this glorious person ? Whence did he come ? Blessed Jesus, who art thou ? The more I consider

the more I am lost in the sublime contemplation. Art thou a glorious and exalted creature? Surely not. That awful Being must be something more than a creature, who is called the only-begotten Son of God, the heir of all things, by whom the worlds were made, who ‘was in the beginning with God, and who was God.’ Surely these appellations are more glorious than can be applied to any creature of whatsoever degree of excellency we may suppose him to be. What then is Jesus? Is he God; really and properly God? What, two Gods, three Gods, and yet but one! Does it not seem to imply a contradiction? What shall I say? I am lost and bewildered in the thought. Gracious God, I rejoice to think that it is not absolutely necessary to salvation to have a very clear and comprehensive idea, or to be firmly and obstinately settled in these abstruse and mysterious points. This I am certain of, and it is enough for me to know, that ‘the Lord Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost all such as come unto God by him.’ But, then, what has this glorious Being done, and for whom? Why, ‘he loved me and gave himself for me.’ May I dare to say it? What! that the Lord Jesus Christ loved and gave himself for such a sinful wretch as I am! When I consider the number of my sins, their greatness, and the peculiar aggravations that have attended them, I am ready to fear that I am not one for whom Jesus died. But why art thou cast down, O my soul? He died for the chief of sinners. Every one that repenteth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy. ‘Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.’ And did he love me! Yes,

though with trembling I say it, he did—he did: ‘He loved me and gave himself for me.’ He atoned even for my offences. O my soul, reviving thought! How great a load does it remove from my mind! I can scarcely believe, yet how can I doubt it? Amazing condescension in the Son of God to leave the regions of celestial glory; to leave that bosom on which he had rested with so much complacency from eternal ages, ‘to take upon him the form of a servant, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,’ and all this from a principle of the most generous, the most disinterested, benevolence and compassion,—out of love to those who hated him, and were in open rebellion against him! ‘Amazing pity, grace unknown, and love beyond degree!’

“From hence learn, O my soul, to love Jesus. O stupid, senseless heart, to cleave so to the dust, and to be so very negligent, so very unmindful of this best of friends! Blessed Jesus, though I hope I do in some measure love thee, yet it is not as I would, it is not as I ought to love thee. O touch my heart ‘as with a coal from thy altar.’ I trust I can appeal to thee, I would love thee more. I long to do it. I would engage my treacherous, wandering, foolish, sinful, worldly heart to love thee; but, alas! it starts aside like a deceitful bow. ‘Turn thou me and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God.’

“From hence, again, O my soul, learn to put thy trust in Jesus. Come thyself to him. He is able to keep thee by his almighty power unto that

great day. The roaring lion may perhaps roar against thee.—The world may use all its arts either to terrify or allure thee from the path of duty. But, O my soul, march on, ‘press forward to the heavenly gate.’ Thy General is near. The Captain of thy salvation hath his eye continually upon thee, to observe how thou acquittest thyself in the warfare. Endeavour to act the part that he will approve, and thou mayest depend upon it, he will encircle thee with his arm, as in a castle, an impregnable fortress, and will bring thee off more than conqueror.

“Lastly, learn, O my soul, to be reconciled to the thoughts of death. This will be the means of bringing thee into the immediate, blissful presence of that glorious Redeemer, whom having not seen thou lovest. It is true, the path is rough, the journey painful; flesh and blood have a natural reluctance to it. But why should I be discouraged? The conflict, though sharp, is but short; and my Saviour will make me conqueror even in death itself. What! will he leave me then, when I have most need of strength? Surely not. I cannot harbour so unkind, so ungenerous, a thought. I will trust him. He has brought me hitherto, and has done so much for me, and I hope, yea, I am sure, ‘he will never leave me nor forsake me.’”

Mr. Belsham was now preparing for the arduous and important office of the Christian ministry. The following letters from the Rev. James Belsham are a proof of the liberality of the father’s mind, and of the judicious manner in which his son had been taught and encouraged to pursue his studies, and

to qualify himself for the faithful and useful discharge of those duties in which he was shortly to engage.

“ DEAR TOMMY,

“ I thank you for your acceptable letter. I am well pleased with your account of your studies. Remember, that philosophy is only to be an amusement of a leisure hour; but Greek and Latin will be of constant use and ornament in explaining the Bible, and understanding many useful authors. I heartily wish and pray for the blessing of God upon your labours, and hope you may be a useful and ornamental member of society. Particularly the tongues will be of service to you; and if you should be called, as most Dissenting ministers are by their situation, to teach a school. Therefore I am glad you apply to them every day. I thank God I am well, and make a very agreeable visit here, where I shall stay at least till the middle of November.—I don't know who put my epigram into the News, for it was refused when Mr. Palmer sent it; but I wish it may be well considered by those whom it may concern. I am sorry so many Dissenters should shew such a spirit of discontent and bitterness under the best and most gentle of governments, which is so tender of liberties in general, and theirs in particular. With my respectful compliments to Dr. Ashworth and family, and your tutors and fellow-students,

“ I rest, your affectionate father,

“ JAMES BELSHAM.

“ *Park Street, Bristol, Oct. 7, 1769.*”

“ *Bedford, March 9, 1770.*

“ DEAR TOMMY,

“ By the goodness of God I arrived safe at Bedford on Tuesday last, and now have leisure to answer your request in your last. The first direction I have to give you is, what I doubt not your good tutor hath always inculcated, that you should study the Scriptures and follow no authority of men ; but with prayer to God for a good understanding to embrace what is therein plainly revealed, and in other things not to be positive and dogmatical. In the main, I have thought it my duty to declare myself Calvinistical (moderately explained) in the doctrines of the Trinity, the Satisfaction of our Saviour, Justification, and Baptism. And the main points which I have aimed at, and which I look upon as the grand subject of preaching, are, that the means are ours, and the blessing is God’s ; which points, if they be kept in memory, and adhered to and followed in preaching, will be the sure way, in my opinion, to avoid enthusiasm on the one hand, or too great dependency on our own works on the other. I pray God to bless your studies ; and I would recommend to you as a pattern of preaching Dr. Watts’s Sermons, and the Bury-Street Lectures, in the main, as containing an evangelical strain of preaching, which you will find also in the Old Church and Puritan Divines, in their practical writings ; remembering, that in their polemical writings you are not bound to follow their distinctions, or to look upon their particular explanation of some doctrines as infallible ; but by comparing one place of Scripture with another, you are to choose

that which appears best to reconcile the whole, and not lay a great stress upon that which appears to be uncertain or hard to be understood; for that which is most necessary is most plain, and most easy to be understood. Your mamma, brothers, and sisters are well, and join in love to you. I hear you have bought a pair of spectacles. I would advise you not to wear them constantly, but only in cases of necessity. It looks like affectation, and you will look old in time, without affecting to appear so, while you are young, and the fashion of wearing spectacles will be of no use to you in the world, but the common use of them, in time become necessary. With our respects to your tutors, to Mrs. and Miss Ashworths, and your fellow-pupils,

“ I remain, your very affectionate father,

“ JAMES BELSHAM.”

The beginning of the year 1770 is distinguished by the following remarks, which will serve as a specimen of the faithful exactness with which Mr. Belsham observed and registered the state of his mind, and the manner in which he conducted himself.

“ Tuesday, Jan. 30.—My devotions to-day were by no means comfortable till this evening in private, when I was serious, and more affectionate, and more engaged than I usually am. I hope I have upon the whole improved my time tolerably well. I sometimes feel it difficult to suppress envious, discontented thoughts, and have been very gloomy to-

day, on account of my sense of my inability for the ministerial employment.”

“ Wednesday, 31.—My devotions in social worship have been mingled with great wandering, and even in secret have been by no means comfortable. My spirits have been generally low ; and I have been betrayed sometimes, to my shame, into very indecent gusts of passion and heat in disputing. I hope my time has not upon the whole been misimproved.”

“ Friday, Feb. 2.—It was preparation day. I went to meeting as usual. I was too much wandering and unaffected. In the evening prayer, in the family, I was serious, but I fear too much addicted to pride, and was sometimes at a great loss. I have been in some good degree serious to-day, especially towards the evening. I fear in rather too melancholy a frame. I find too many disquieting and uneasy passions boiling in my breast, and disturbing the peace and tranquillity of my mind. My time upon the whole tolerably well improved. I rejoice in the prospect of the sacrament day. It is long, very long, since I have been favoured with that delightful season. O may I be in a prepared frame, that I may not be disappointed when I come to my Saviour’s board ! To this end, may God bless the preparatory exercises of worship, and make them exceedingly beneficial to me.”

“ Saturday, Feb. 3rd.—This was the day before the sacrament. I spent the morning as usual in devotional exercises, in confessing and mourning over my sins, and renewing my covenant engage-

ments with God. I hope my time was not lost. I did not, indeed, gain such a degree of fervour and warmth as I could have wished ; yet I hope I was sincere, and my thoughts in general were tolerably well composed. I particularly mourned over and prayed against the levity of my heart ; against pride, anger, fretfulness, and envy. I did not formally read over my covenant engagements ; but I kneeled down, and in my own form of words devoted myself afresh to the Lord ; and this I did with composure, cheerfulness, and some, though no very high, degree of joy. I cannot say that the temper and frame of my mind to-day has been what I could wish it to be. My time has not been so well improved as it should be, nor have I been sufficiently alive in social worship, though in some acts of devotion I have been serious, particularly at the devotional lecture, and at the society this evening.”

On the review of the week preceding the 25th of March, the following remarks occur in Mr. Belsham’s diary :

“ My Sabbath was spent in too formal and negligent a manner. My devotions in the week have been remarkably cold and distracted. I have had some returns of fretfulness and envy ; but I thank God I have sometimes been free from both. My time has not been so well improved as it ought to be. But my greatest affliction has been my disappointment of the intimate friendship of my dearest friend. This is what I can hardly bear. It almost breaks my heart. I did not know my attachment was so strong. But I hope I have been enabled to resign, in some degree, to the will of God, and to look more

to that friend ‘who sticketh closer than a brother.’”

“Saturday, April 2.—This was the day before the sacrament, but, alas! far from being spent in the manner such days usually are spent by me. I spent the morning before breakfast in the usual exercises of self-examination, dedication, and prayer; but was not so lively as I sometimes am. I hope, however, that I was not wholly unaffected or unimproved. I was particular in confessing my loss of time, my wandering in devotion, my pride and passion, and hope I felt the sincerest shame and sorrow on account of them. I read the Dedication, and I hope heartily consented to it. I was serious, but not very lively; sometimes wandering. In the afternoon I was foolishly in a violent passion about a trifling affair. This gave me great uneasiness, and unfitted me for business and devotion. Towards the close of the afternoon I walked in the fields and meditated on the ministerial work, I hope with improvement. In the evening I did not go down to supper, but wrote out the rough draft of my self-dedication to the work of the ministry. At the society cold and unaffected. After the society, finished my rough draft, and wrote my diary. Upon the whole, I cannot but reflect on this day with a great degree of uneasiness, as not being spent in a manner proper for a preparation for the sacrament. O God, pity my infirmities, forgive my sins!”

The almost unvaried manner in which Mr. Belsham spent his time at Daventry in close application to his studies, and in unabated watchfulness over himself, renders a more copious extract from

his diary at this period unnecessary ; but in the course of this year he began to take a part in the public devotional services of the Sabbath, and to make preparation for the pulpit, and he has noted the 13th of March as the day on which he finished the composition of his first sermon. The care with which he endeavoured to fit himself for the proper discharge of duty, and the fear which he expresses lest his efforts should be unsuccessful, plainly shew how necessary he considered his own exertions, while he solely depended on divine assistance and blessing for ultimate success. This state and feeling of mind, so carefully and habitually cherished, he maintained through the whole of life ; and though his views on the controverted doctrines of religion were completely changed before he had passed the meridian of his days, he never lost sight of the divine agency, or of the government and providence of the Supreme Being, though he ceased to expect that extraordinary and almost supernatural assistance and interposition which, in his younger days, he thought essential to the faithful and acceptable discharge of duty, and for which, at that time, it appeared to him neither extravagant nor absurd to offer direct petition at the throne of heavenly grace. His own observation makes any apology for the following quotation from his diary unnecessary. It strongly indicates the seriousness and piety of his mind, and the deliberation with which he devoted himself to the arduous office of the ministry ; and his subsequent discharge of its duties equally proves, how much he was influenced by the resolutions which he formed, and by the earnest desire

to be found “a workman that needeth not be ashamed.”

“Sunday, June 3rd.—This is a day to be noted among the extraordinary days of my life. I set apart the morning hours before breakfast for a most serious and solemn dedication of myself to the ministerial office. I began with an introductory prayer for divine assistance. I then read John xiv. With pleasure I meditated on my views, and motives, and resolutions, and earnestly prayed to God that they might be right. After this I meditated on the form of dedication, which after I had done some time I knelt down and read it solemnly through, and I hope I was attentive, and assented to every word. After this I rose up, meditated on the difficulties and discouragements I was to meet with; read John xvi., and then prayed, I hope earnestly and seriously, for the aids of divine grace for my direction, support, and success. After that I read Dr. Doddridge’s Hymn on Rejoicing in Covenant Engagements with God, and concluded with a secret commendation of myself and what I had been engaged in, to the Divine blessing, begging that it might answer the intended end, viz. to make me more sensible of the awfulness and importance of the ministerial work, and to engage me to greater solicitude to discharge the duties of it. Upon the whole, this exercise was serious, and had I not been sometimes interrupted, it would have been very much to my satisfaction. I was much affected in reading the form of dedication, which I drew up myself, but had not time to do it so accurately as I could wish. I afterwards wrote it out, and solemnly

signed and sealed it. I pray God that an abiding impression of this may long dwell upon my mind, and be of use to me through the whole of future life. I hope my intentions were upright, ‘that the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, were acceptable in thy sight,’ O Lord, through Jesus Christ, my strength and my Redeemer.”

The following is a copy of this Dedication, which Mr. Belsham carefully preserved, with the observations he made upon it at a later period:

“ THE FORM OF MY SELF-DEDICATION TO THE
WORK OF THE MINISTRY.

“ Eternal God, my heavenly Father ! Thou art my creator and preserver, O Lord, and thou hast redeemed me, thy unworthy creature, thy ungrateful beneficiary, with the precious blood of thy only-begotten Son. All my past and present comforts, and all my future hopes, are owing to thy rich, unmerited, forfeited goodness. Thou hast, therefore, the justest claim to the best services I can possibly render thee, in whatever station of life thy all-disposing providence may see fit to place me. The voice of providence I desire to follow. That voice, by putting it into the heart of my friends, and into my own heart, and by conducting me thus far through the course of study preparatory to the ministerial work, seems to be calling me to that important office. This sacred work, therefore, I have ventured to undertake, and in this do I desire, if I know my own heart, to serve thee, O my God, diligently and faithfully to the utmost of my power. I hope, upon the most impartial examination, that

I can truly say, that in undertaking this arduous work I have no secular end in view ; no desire or design to gain the applause of men, or the emoluments of the world ; but that my only motives are gratitude to God and the Redeemer, together with the most tender and affectionate concern for precious, immortal souls. And the great end I propose to myself is to promote the glory of God and the Redeemer, by promoting the eternal salvation of my fellow-creatures. May I not appeal to thee, O thou great Searcher of hearts, that these are the real sentiments of my soul ? I come therefore into thy presence, at this time, solemnly to set myself apart to this awful work, in the discharge of which I do determine, if it be the will of Providence, to spend the remainder of my days on earth. In this view I do solemnly resolve in thy presence, O Lord, to employ my future time and health, my abilities, and possessions, and influence, all in subordination to this grand end, the glory of God and the salvation of souls. I do solemnly resolve to seek after truth, with all the diligence and impartiality I can, and will make it my business to speak it, as it is in Jesus, without fearing the censures or courting the applause of men. I do determine thoroughly to study the nature of the ministerial office, and to perform the various, arduous, and important duties of it, with all the courage and resolution, and, at the same time, with all that modesty, gentleness, and prudence, which the matter may require ; and desire to manifest in my own character a bright example of those virtues and graces which I would earnestly recommend to others.—Nor do I undertake this

great work rashly, or without sufficient deliberation ; but in the full view of all its difficulties and discouragements ; in full expectation of meeting with many trials ; more, perhaps, than I can at present imagine from the temptations of Satan, from the injurious treatment of a sinful and ill-natured world, from external straits, and from inward weakness and depravity. Yet I hope I can say, ‘ None of these things move me, neither do I count my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I may receive from the Lord Jesus.’—At the same time that I make these resolutions I am fully convinced of my own weakness and incapacity to perform them of myself. I therefore form them all in dependance upon the grace of God ; who, if he has indeed called me to the work, will doubtless furnish me with grace sufficient to enable me to discharge the duties of it. O that I may daily derive supplies of those influences from the great Head of the church, with whom is the residue of the Spirit, and who has promised to be with his faithful ministers always, even to the end of the world. By him may my understanding be enlightened, my strength and courage be maintained ; and through him may my consolations always abound. To him do I recommend my faithful labours for all desirable success in this world, and for that glorious reward which awaits his faithful ministers and ambassadors in a future state.

“ After all, I well know I may be mistaken. I may mistake my own views and principles, or I may mistake the voice of providence. If, then, it

should hereafter appear, that this is really the case—if thou, O Lord, shouldst in the course of thy providence see fit to throw me aside as a useless vessel, and to say concerning me, ‘I have no pleasure in him, neither will I accept of his services in this way,’ I would humbly reply, ‘Thy will, O Lord, be done; behold thy servant, do with him as seemeth good in thy sight.’ But if, as upon the most serious examination I have at present reason to believe, thou hast indeed called me to this honourable and important office, I have now, in thy presence, most solemnly declared what my motives, my ends, my resolutions and dependencies are; and unto thee, O thou omniscient God, do I solemnly appeal for the sincerity and uprightness of my words and intentions, in token whereof, and as in the sight of that awful Being who cannot be deceived, and who will not be mocked, I here set my hand and seal, this third day of June, 1770.

“THOMAS BELSHAM.”

On the back of this document are the following observations, dated October 27, 1811:

“I remember it well. With what doubts and fears, with what anxiety and depression of spirits, did I enter upon this sacred and honourable office! I thought myself unworthy and unqualified for the meanest station in the church; but with what wonder and gratitude do I review the conduct of Divine Providence and the great goodness of God, after the experience of more than forty years! Through what scenes have I passed! what trials have I endured! what situations have I occupied! what acceptance have I experienced! what means of in-

formation have I enjoyed ! through what difficulties and perplexities have I been carried ! what rewards and honours and comforts have I been favoured with ! and may I not add, of what usefulness have I been honoured as the instrument ! In what an honourable, comfortable, and useful situation am I now placed ! ‘By the grace of God, I am what I am.’ And if I have in some views laboured more abundantly or more successfully than others, I most sincerely and gratefully acknowledge, ‘It is not I, but the grace of God, that was with me.’ In what straits and difficulties, in what anxieties and fears have I at times been involved ! All has been darkness and gloom ; ‘deep has called unto deep, the waves and billows have gone over me ;’ ‘but in the mount of danger God hath appeared.’ He has dissipated my fears. He hath exceeded my hope. Surely no one has met with such wonderful, seasonable, merciful, unexpected interpositions of providence as myself. And oh ! how little have I deserved it ! This is indeed a tender and painful subject, the recollection of frailty, folly, and sin. My soul hath it still in remembrance, and is humbled within me. If anything can enhance the great and distinguished goodness of God, it is the great unworthiness of the instrument which he has vouchsafed to employ, whose only hope is in infinite mercy. Having been an herald to others, O God, let me not finally be cast away.”

At the commencement of the Midsummer vacation, Mr. Belsham completed the fourth year of his academical studies. The end of this year was the period, when the candidates for the ministry, at

Daventry, were allowed to make their first essay as preachers. Mr. Belsham began his career at Newport Pagnell, where his father had formerly officiated as minister. The following is his own account of the manner in which he acquitted himself in this new character, in which he was afterwards so distinguished ; for, with no external advantages of person or address, there have been few preachers who so entirely engaged and fixed the attention of an audience, or who have made such a deep impression upon the mind of the hearer.

“ Sunday, June 17th.—This has been a remarkable day to me indeed. I preached for Mr. Bull both parts of the day, and did it to my great comfort and edification, especially in the afternoon, and I hope through grace my discourses were not wholly unprofitable to others. A good man, with tears in his eyes, thanked me for the afternoon sermon, which he called a heavenly discourse. I thank God for this encouragement. It gives me fresh spirits. I was much dejected after the morning service, and began to fear that my discourse would not be liked ; but God was better to me than my fears suggested, and I was this afternoon much encouraged. At the sacrament I was serious and devotional, considering Christ under the view of my supporter and comforter. It relieved me much, so that I continued cheerful all the evening. I am much afraid of pride ; but I have prayed, and I hope sincerely, to guard against it, and I will continue to pray. Lord, thou knowest the heart of thy servant. O, give me right views and right dispositions, and incline my heart to love thee, and to

endeavour after the promotion of thy glory and the good of all around me.—My private devotions have been, I hope, serious, and my meditations in general sweet and refreshing.”

The institution at Daventry may be said to have originated with the Rev. John Jennings, of Kibworth. The reader will find an ample account of the able manner in which the studies of the young men were conducted by this pious, learned, and truly indefatigable divine, in the Correspondence of Dr. Doddridge, published by his grandson, John Doddridge Humphreys, Esq., Vol. I. p. 462.—On the death of Mr. Jennings, after an interval of some years, Dr., then Mr., Doddridge, formed the design of preparing a few young men for the Christian ministry, on the plan of his respected tutor, in which he was encouraged by Dr. Watts and many of his brethren, He began with seven pupils,* and for a time pursued his arduous labours alone; but provision being made for the support and education of a greater number by the munificent patronage of William Coward, Esq., Dr. Doddridge, who had then removed to Northampton, availed himself of the services of an assistant. It was the Doctor's plan to admit lay students; and many young men of dissenting families, and some of the established church, were committed to his care. At one time the whole number was forty-four, a decided proof of the ability and success with which the business of the institution was conducted.

After the death of Dr. Doddridge, the Academy was removed from Northampton to Daventry,

* Three of these only were intended for the ministry.

under the care of Dr. Ashworth and two assistant tutors, chosen by the principal, though not without consulting Mr. Coward's trustees. One of these assistants delivered lectures on the Mathematics and some branches of Natural Philosophy, and the other superintended the classical studies of the young men. On the occurrence of any vacancy in these departments, it was not unusual, at this time, to appoint one of the students, who was thought to be qualified for the office, to instruct the junior pupils. On the conclusion of his own course of studies, the person thus engaged was usually appointed to the Tutorship; but this plan was obviously attended with many disadvantages; for though it may be admitted, that the student thus distinguished was allowed to have attained a competent knowledge of the subject on which he would be called to instruct others, yet it is equally evident that, until he had finished his course, he would regard himself, and be regarded by others, as a student, subject, as others were, to the regulations of the institution, and he would attend the lectures delivered to his own class, as others did; and on this account he could scarcely assume the authority of a tutor, or be treated as such. And when he was regularly appointed to the office, it was some time before the classes connected with him completed their studies and were succeeded by those who would have no such relation to their superintendent, nor those habits of familiarity with him, to which their predecessors had been accustomed. For a time it may be imagined, that the application and diligence of the junior classes would be relaxed,

or with difficulty excited; and the feelings and authority of the tutor would by no means be satisfactory and effective. In particular instances these inconveniences might be less felt, or sooner surmounted; but the plan itself was certainly defective, and the sub-tutors were too much dependent upon the principal.

At the time Mr. Belsham was pursuing his studies at Daventry, the department of the Classical Tutor was ably filled, by the Rev. Thomas Hali-day, who had been educated at this seminary. He was a man of considerable talent, a very popular preacher, and eminently qualified for his office by the accurate knowledge he had attained of the best Greek and Latin writers, and by a clear and familiar manner of communicating his instructions. This gentleman having given notice of his intention to resign his situation, Dr. Ashworth applied to Mr. Belsham to undertake the Greek class for the ensuing session, to which he consented, after having consulted his friends and been encouraged by them.

Mr. Belsham returned to Daventry on the opening of the session, in August, entered on the business of tuition, and conducted the examination of the Greek class in the presence of Mr. Coward's Trustees, and of the neighbouring ministers—on which occasion he was complimented by the Trustees. To be qualified for such an undertaking was no trifling proof of Mr. Belsham's abilities and acquirements, and to have engaged in it with so much credit to himself must have placed him in an advantageous situation in regard to those who were in future to attend his lectures.

During the autumn, Mr. Belsham was actively engaged in the duties of his office, pursuing his own studies, and occasionally preaching with great acceptance in the neighbouring congregations. But it now pleased Divine Providence to visit him with severe afflictions, in the deaths of his father and of his eldest brother. Both these awful and distressing events greatly affected his mind, and produced a degree of depression and despondency which he could scarcely resist. The notice which he takes in his diary of the former of these events, necessarily partakes of the mystery which accompanied it, and it is not extraordinary that his mind was very much disturbed by it. The reader must be informed, that the elder Mr. Belsham was subject to occasional aberrations of mind, and it is supposed that, under the influence of this unhappy malady, he threw himself into the Ouse, which flowed at the bottom of his garden. He was found drowned after he had been missing some days.

It will be evident to the reader in the sequel of this Memoir, that Mr. Belsham was very sensible of the physical tendency of this constitutional malady ; and some expressions which occur in his diary can only be interpreted by supposing, that in the hours of privacy and seclusion he was himself subject to some depression of mind, which strongly excited his fears and apprehensions ; though in society no one was more cheerful and lively, or generally more free from the least traces of any morbid feeling or sensibility. His mind seems to have been always clear and brilliant, and his thoughts and sentiments to have been collected and judicious,

whenever he gave expression to them in conversation or in writing. Doubtless much of this self-possession, and entire freedom from mental disorder, was owing to the influence of those religious sentiments which he adopted in maturer life, and to that constant and abiding sense which he maintained of the presence and agency of God, and of the perfect rectitude and kindness of all his dispensations, and from his firm and unhesitating conviction, so often and so strongly expressed, that however unfavourable present appearances might be, or however painful and distressing the present-event, all were parts of that grand and benevolent scheme which involves the final happiness of all, and which ultimately will redound to the glory of God, and the accomplishment of his wise and merciful designs. This conviction soothed and composed his mind in circumstances in which it might otherwise have been distressed and agitated, and called forth the language of entire submission and acquiescence, which he so frequently adopted, "Not my will, O God, but thine be done."

The following are the observations which Mr. Belsham made in his diary, on first hearing of the alarm into which his family had been thrown by the absence of his father :

"Thursday and Friday, Oct. 11, 12.—These have been two dark and melancholy days. On Thursday I heard of my father's absconding, and probably of his death. This unexpected, awful providence has filled my heart with sorrow and distress. The uncertainty I have been in, has

borne down my spirits, and prevented me from relishing any comfort. Hope seems to be almost excluded. I cannot but fear the worst; and I cannot but fear on account of my poor mother, lest her heart should break under the weight of grief. I wrote to her by this morning's post, and suggested those consolations which I thought might be of the most use. I pray God she may find them useful. With regard to myself, my distress has caused me to lose almost all my time, has palled all my comforts, and rendered my devotions themselves unpleasant. I find it difficult to be resigned to the painful stroke; and I find my need of better strength and better wisdom than my own to enable me to bear and improve it well. But I beg of God to assist me: to prepare me, to prepare my mother, my brothers and sisters, for the worst, and to sanctify this unexpected, severe, and awful dispensation to us all."

On the 19th, Mr. Belsham continues, "To-day I received the melancholy news of my father's death. It has filled my heart with great distress, and I have had few comfortable moments. Nevertheless, I hope I do not repine at my heavenly Father's dispensations, but would entirely acquiesce in them. Lord, I am thine, do with me as thou seest best. O be my Father and my God. As thou hast removed an earthly parent, an earthly friend, guide, instructor, and counsellor, I entreat thee to fill up his place, and to be my father, my friend, my instructor, counsellor, and guide. I pray God I may learn instruction by this awful

dispensation of his providence, and that his spirit and his grace may be my guide through this howling wilderness.”

Mr. Belsham has preserved copies of letters addressed by his uncle Pickard, to Mrs. James Belsham, and to her daughter, Mrs. Healey, on this melancholy occasion, in which, with great piety and feeling, he endeavours to suggest such consolation as the uncertainty of the event admitted, and to prepare them for the probable issue of their inquiries. That to Mrs. Healey, written after the event was certainly known, will be a sufficient specimen of the kind and truly affectionate sympathy with which Mr. Pickard entered into the situation of the family, and of his concern to alleviate their distress by directing their thoughts to the only source of true fortitude and resignation, the wise and merciful providence of God.

The Rev. EDWARD PICKARD to Mrs. HEALEY,
On hearing that her father was dead, and that her brother's life was
despaired of.

“DEAR MRS. HEALEY,

“They are indeed dark and heavy trials to which you are called out. Humanity itself weeps with and for you. Christian compassion urges the tear of sympathetic sorrow. If our prayers for you may be heard to obtain that support and comfort which you need, be assured you have them. The prayer of faith and submission will be accepted of God; your own prayers for yourselves and one another, as well as those of your friends for you.

Wait upon God, and he will strengthen your hearts. Pour out your hearts before him, he will be your refuge. The broken sighs, the unutterable groanings of a distressed, but humble, submissive spirit, have a language which the Father of our spirits hears and understands with the tenderest compassion. Jesus, our merciful high-priest, felt and uttered them in the days of his flesh, and knows how to pity and succour them who are thus tried. Think not that God has forgotten you, or that he hath gone forth in anger against you. Those whom he loves he has often tried the most. Witness his own well-beloved Son, when upon earth, who is described as ‘a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.’ God’s ways are often dark. He is sometimes a God who hideth himself from us; but he is always wise, good, and faithful—perfectly, unchangeably so. His covenant and promises shall never fail. Though for a small moment he may hide his face, yet with everlasting kindness will he return and have mercy upon us. Though he chasten his children with a rod, yet he will not forget, nor utterly forsake them. He has wise ends in all he does. He can make up the want of the best and dearest comforts upon earth, by his presence and love. Heaven lies beyond all. The way to it may be thorny, but it is the way which God points out for us; he is with us through it, and will lead us safely to his presence—‘where there is fulness of joy, and to his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.’ There we shall admire and praise him for those things which are

now the subject of our complaint, and all bitter remembrance of former sorrows and trials shall be swallowed up in everlasting love and joy.

“This second stroke, if it has taken place, as your letter gives us great reason to fear, is affecting indeed, but far from being without comfort and hope. Who of us can tell what might be in future life—from what evil hours he may mercifully be delivered? God knows all.—And those things which are against our wishes, may be the subject of our eternal triumph and praise. O blessed, O glorious day! when all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and sorrow from our hearts; when death shall be destroyed for ever; when the redeemed of the Lord shall come forth with everlasting songs, and pious friends and Christians unite with angels in perfect, everlasting devotion, love, and joy.

“I could enlarge. I write from affection and concern for you all, particularly for your dear mother. We are glad you are with her. We hope you will not suffer by this act of duty and love. May God lift up upon you all the light of his countenance. May he enable you to support and comfort one another. May he give you the spirit of hope and consolation. May he assist you to behave with that resignation and acquiescence I know you desire to do. May he lead you to the right improvement of all.

——“My son is not insensible to the grief of his friends. He feels very tenderly for you, and joins in our sympathy. May those in youth hear and attend to this awful voice. The badness of the weather, and a very bad cold, has made it scarcely fit to go out. I thank God I am better, and so is

my wife. I write her feelings and sentiments as well as my own, though, if writing was fit for her, she would express them much better. I will not say, my dear friend, forgive this long letter. I wish I may be directed to say or to suggest any thing serviceable to you. I close it with my hearty prayers for you all. I am dear Mrs. Healey's affectionate uncle and faithful friend,

“E. PICKARD.”

“*London, Oct. 23, 1770.*”

Mr. Belsham has given a very able, and doubtless a very just and accurate, sketch of the character, abilities, and influence of Mr. Pickard, and of the high and deserved estimation in which he was held by the body of Dissenters to which he belonged, in his Memoir of the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, p. 63. It is by no means difficult to trace in the sentiments expressed in these letters, one of the sources from which Mr. Belsham derived those just notions of the government and providence of God, which he entertained from the earliest period of his intellectual life; and considering the great intimacy to which Mr. Belsham was admitted by his venerated relation, and the high respect which he entertained for him, it may easily be imagined that the character and conduct of his uncle were regarded as a pattern which he was ambitious to imitate. Mr. Belsham's manner of writing bears no trifling resemblance to the style of these letters, and it may not be an unfounded conjecture, that it was formed after the model of his uncle's. It appears from a letter of Mrs. Belsham to the subject of this memoir,

dated Feb. 22, 1776, that a diploma was awarded to Mr. Pickard by one of the Scotch Universities, but he never thought proper to assume the title which it conferred.

The distressing event alluded to in Mr. Pickard's letter was followed by the death of Mr. Belsham's eldest brother, Samuel, which appears to have been sudden and unexpected, in consequence of a fever. He had been on a visit to Daventry in September. On the 6th, Mr. Thomas Belsham accompanied him as far as Foster's Booth, on his return to Bedford, where, says Mr. Belsham, "I took my last farewell of him in this world. O, how little did he or I then imagine it!"

On the 27th of October, Mr. Belsham writes, "I heard this evening of the death of my dear brother. The shock at first almost made me faint away, and I could sleep but little in the night. The greater part of the next day was uncomfortably spent, but towards the evening I felt my spirits sweetly composed at the thoughts, the pleasing thoughts, of my father's and brother's happiness, and found my mind more resigned to the will of God, and more disposed to trust in him than it was before. I thank God for his supports, for the sympathy I meet with from kind friends, for all the hopes I entertain with regard to the safety and happiness of my departed friends, and for all the alleviations of my heavy affliction. 'I would be still and know that he is God,' trusting in his perfect wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness, rejoicing in the triumphant expectation of meeting my dear friends again in glory—never, never more to feel the anguish of the parting stroke.

I shall then be let into the light and knowledge of that I know not now, and trust I shall be happy in the presence and enjoyment of God and Jesus through the long succession of eternal ages.”

On the 29th he adds, “ I have been more cheerful to-day by far than I was yesterday or the day before ; yet still at times have had most painful thoughts. My frame, however, has in the main been as I would have it—very tender, at the same time composed and resigned. I feel my loss, and I weep for it ; at the same time, my joy at the thoughts of the happiness of my dear deceased friends, and the transporting expectation of soon meeting them again, fills me with unutterable delight. My bodily frame in the morning out of order, which made my spirits faint and low ; but better this afternoon and evening. The chief thing that makes me uneasy is the apprehension of the sleep of the soul, but it does not give me very great disquietude.”

On the review of the month, he very strongly expresses his feelings, acute, indeed, but not unsubdued by the influence of those religious principles by which his mind was regulated and governed :

“ A dreadful month indeed !—a month that will ever be recollected with anguish to the last moment of my life, for in this month did my dear father die, and my dear brother followed soon after him. O painful stroke ! O mysterious conduct of Divine Providence, thus to tear down at once the two grand columns and supports of the family ! But the will of God be done. These awful strokes have prevented me from attending to any business with

any degree of care, and have filled my mind with dejection and distress. My greatest consolation has been to think that they are now happy—perfectly, immutably happy; and that I trust, ere long, to meet them again, to participate of their happiness without any danger of a future separation. God grant that I may not, ‘through an evil heart of unbelief, finally fall short of this rest’! I attended the sacrament the beginning of this month, but not with my usual seriousness, attention, and comfort, though I hope still with some advantage; and I have not, this month, kept so close to my covenant engagements as I ought.

“Well, I am now left in an unfriendly world, in a dark, dreary wilderness, with my chief friends, my principal supports, taken from me. In this distressing situation, how comforting to think my God and my Saviour are for ever the same! God will be my father, and the Lord Jesus Christ my dear elder brother, though earthly brothers and fathers are removed. I find that before I leaned too much upon the world. I have found it a broken reed, yea, even a spear. May these awful dispensations teach me wisdom! May they cause me to sit loose to the world, to moderate my expectations from it, to aspire after heavenly, unchanging, and eternal joys! And, O, my Father! do thou conduct me to eternal bliss by that way which thou choosest, however contrary to my present inclinations! I ask it for Jesus’ sake. Amen.”

Sunday, Nov. 25th. This day is noted by Mr. Belsham as the first time he preached at Daventry, and he observes, “with a greater degree of pleasure

than I imagined I should do. I prayed for help, and help was granted, more even than I expected. I hope other religious exercises, both social and secret, have been of some comfort and advantage. With regard to temper, I have sometimes been hardly able to keep it under, yet I hope it never broke out very violently. I fear lest pride should in some degree have gained the ascendant."

On the review of the month, he says, "I preached at Kettering on the 4th, and at Northampton on the 11th. The intermediate week I spent in a melancholy interview with my Bedford friends. Melancholy indeed it was, but I trust profitable. The sight of my father's and my brother's graves affected me deeply, and the being in those places, and in that company, where I always used to meet them, but shall now, alas! meet them no more, made a mournful and a lasting impression upon my mind. Would to God it may be as useful as it is painful, and that I may have reason from my heart to say, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted'!"

The following extract from Mr. Belsham's diary of the following year shews the high standard he fixed in estimating his own character, and will account for many expressions of imperfection and sinfulness, which, if he had entertained juster views of human nature, and had formed an opinion of his own character under the influence of better principles of religion, he could not have applied to himself.

April 23rd.—"My private and social devotions have been uncomfortable. Alas! my heart was much out of frame for both; my temper, too, far

from that mildness and composure I long and strive after. I wish to be friendly, generous, benevolent, and kind. I wish to be that perfect character which I can imagine to myself; but O how far do I fall short !”

The following reflections are copied from the diary of the 26th of the same month, which was the anniversary of his birth-day :

“ I have now finished another year of this mortal life, which I pass ‘as a tale that is told.’ How many more of these I may have to pass, God only knows. Life is no more than a vapour. God grant that I may live as one convinced of this ! I have many mercies to be thankful for, received in the course of the last year ; and I have had some heavy trials mingled with my comforts. I would accept of all the Divine dispensations with complacency and cheerfulness. ‘ Father, not my will, but thine be done.’ My sins have been numerous, some of them dreadfully great and aggravated ; but God is merciful, who I hope will not only pardon the past, but afford me new strength for futurity. I have now entered into a state in which I must be left to act for myself : but though I am discouraged in the view of my own weakness, ignorance, and inability, God is gracious, who I hope will guide me by his counsel. Remember me, O my God, for good. As I hope I would acknowledge thee in all my ways, O vouchsafe to direct my paths ! Guided by his counsel, supported by his arm, supplied from his inexhaustible fulness, I go on my way with cheerfulness and alacrity, humbly confiding in his

gracious promise, who hath said, ‘ I will not leave thee ; I will never, never forsake thee.’ ”

The middle of the ensuing month terminated the session, and the fifth year of Mr. Belsham’s studies. He had now completed the period which candidates for the ministry usually spent at the Academy ; but being chosen assistant tutor, he continued to reside there, and at the opening of the next session was engaged in a still more arduous department. The following is his own account of this period, on a review of it, after an interval of more than thirty years :

“ I went to Daventry in August, 1766, and remained there as a student till 1771. Here I studied diligently under Mr. Haliday, to whom I am indebted for all that I know of classical literature. Mr. Hill taught Mathematics very well as far as he went. Of Logic and Mathematics he knew but little, and was not at all ambitious of improving himself or his pupils, or of doing any thing more than go over the same routine continually. Under Dr. Ashworth I studied Divinity and Philosophy, and paid such attention to my lectures as to obtain the approbation of my tutor. But I was exceedingly deficient in reading, which I much regret. In August, 1770, upon Mr. Haliday’s leaving the Academy, I took the Greek class, and in August, 1771, when Mr. Hill removed to London, I was appointed tutor in Mathematics, Logic, and Metaphysics. I took pains, and was approved. I loved the pupils and was beloved by them, and was upon good terms with Dr. Ashworth, who died in 1775.”

It might be supposed that Mr. Belsham would not engage in such an important undertaking without consulting his respected friend and relative, Mr. Pickard. The following extracts are a further proof of that gentleman's high respect and regard for Mr. Belsham :

“ I thank you, my dear Sir, for both your obliging letters, which gave us pleasure, as they brought an account of your health and agreeable situation in your new department. But do not you undertake too much? Do not mistake me. I do not mean too much for your application and abilities, but for your health, and for those other studies which are, and which I know you will always think, important, and to pursue which I fear you may be led to devote those hours which may be necessary for rest and recreation, and so your constitution suffer by too close confinement and application. And yet I do not well see how you could decline what you have undertaken. May a good God proportion your strength to your work, and reward you with satisfaction and usefulness ; with the cheering sense of his approbation, and the animating hope of the honours of the great day, and the gracious reward of eternal glory ! These are glorious hopes ; may you and I enjoy them, and feel the energy of them. One thing, however, I would advise and desire of you, that if you find your present engagements too much for you, you would decline them in time, and in a manner respectful to the Doctor, who will not then, I am sure, complain of you, nor will any of your friends blame, but commend you. And an-

other thing I wish,—that you would not decline opportunities of going out to preach, by which, while you are doing a service acceptable and useful to others, and pursuing what you will count your great work, you will procure for yourself exercise and change of air, which will be conducive to your health. You will forgive the freedom of one who loves and wishes you well, and prays God to bless you.”

From this time Mr. Belsham occupied a responsible and important situation in the Academy. Some copies of letters, which are in the hands of the present writer, clearly shew how faithfully he discharged his duty ; how much and how attentively he watched over the conduct of the young men who were under his superintendence ; how kindly, how affectionately, how judiciously, he admonished them ; how earnestly he endeavoured to bring them to a sense of propriety and duty when they were chargeable with any irregularity, or any violation of the rules of the institution : and when his efforts were ineffectual, and he was compelled to express the strongest and most decided censure, by dismissing them from attendance upon his lectures, how anxiously he endeavoured to explain and justify his conduct to their friends, to secure their approbation and their concurrence in the measures which were used to produce reformation. In these letters there is almost a paternal interest in their welfare, and an affectionate concern for their reputation and improvement, which do the highest credit to his feelings and to his heart ; and his advice and admonitions

evinced that maturity of judgment, and that strong sense of propriety and consistency, for which he was so distinguished in after life.

It was long after this period that the writer of this Memoir enjoyed the benefit of Mr. Belsham's instruction, but from his own knowledge of his attainments and ability as a lecturer, he can well conceive, that he would particularly excel in teaching Mathematics and Natural Philosophy. The clearness and precision with which he at all times conveyed his ideas to others must have eminently qualified him for explaining the rudiments of a science, the successful communication of which depends upon lucid illustration, connected reasoning, and clear demonstration.

Though the sphere of Mr. Belsham's avocations and duties was enlarged, he still maintained that attention to religious exercises, and that watchfulness over his temper and conduct, which he prescribed to himself. The following observations shew a state of mental satisfaction and pleasurable feeling which he did not often attain, checked by a consciousness of deficiency and error, which he candidly acknowledges, deeply laments, and humbly, but firmly, resolves to correct.

“April 5th, Sunday morning.—I have now enjoyed another sabbath, and what is more, another sacrament season. My attendance on religious ordinances has been interrupted and impeded by many vain and wandering thoughts; yet upon the whole, blessed be God, I never remember to have enjoyed a more comfortable sabbath. I preached in the morning. My subject was the love of Christ

in calling his disciples his relations ; John xv. 15, ‘ Henceforth I call you not servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth ; but I have called you friends.’ In the service I was much affected, especially in prayer, and in the introduction and improvement of the sermon. Dr. Ashworth’s subject was, the excellence and unsearchableness of the love of Christ. Truly it does indeed surpass our knowledge ! I was more affected than usual. At the sacrament my heart was sometimes wandering, especially in prayer, yet upon the whole was much affected and engaged. I saw the outgoings of my God, my King, in his sanctuary. When eating the bread I thought of these words : ‘ The great love wherewith he loved us.’ They came with power upon my soul, and my heart was overwhelmed with gratitude. I hardly knew how to restrain my tears. When drinking the wine my language was, ‘ Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.’ Truly, upon the whole, it was a most pleasant and delightful opportunity. Methought, ‘ It is good for me to be here.’ I wished to continue : I was loth to depart from the house of my God. I was loth to leave the sacred mount and to come down into this low, this tempting, sinful world.

“ In the evening I staid at home. My time was employed in serious meditation, self-examination, and prayer. I began with asking the Divine blessing. I did it with seriousness. I then read 1 John iii., with attention and pleasure. I examined what had been my conduct since the last opportunity of this kind. I found that in three

things I had acted much amiss;—in inattention and wandering thoughts in devotion; in losing much time, through indolence and irresolution; and above all, in giving way to the influence of my passions. I lamented them bitterly; and, as in the presence of God, I made fresh resolutions against them. O God, grant, I pray thee, that I may hold to my good resolutions in this and every other respect. After this, having sung a hymn, I meditated on the past and future scenes of life; I knelt down, and devoutly thanked God for his past goodness, and committed myself to his care, protection, and blessing, in reference to futurity, in regard to my employment, both as a minister and a tutor. I represented to him my fears and my discouragements, and prayed for grace calmly to acquiesce in his will. The whole was concluded with a general intercessory prayer and a hymn.

“I devoutly acknowledge the goodness of God to me this day. I entered upon it with small expectation, but he has disappointed my fears, and infinitely exceeded my hopes. How pleasant to converse with God and Jesus! What, then, will it be to see his face? Now, when I ‘behold as through a glass darkly,’ mine eye is dazzled with his beauty; my soul is overwhelmed in transports of joy and love; but when my eyes see his face, my heart shall love him more. O the great, the immense, the inconceivable, love with which Christ loved me! When shall I make him more suitable returns? Here, Lord, I give myself away; it is all that I can do.”

Towards the close of the year, application was

made, to Mr. Belsham to take the charge of the congregation assembling in Call-lane, at Leeds, as assistant to Mr. Whitaker, whose age and infirmities induced him to withdraw, in a great measure, from public service. It does not appear from any memoranda in Mr. Belsham's diary, how far he listened to this invitation; but a letter from his uncle Pickard justifies the conclusion, that it had seriously occupied his thoughts. The event shews that Mr. Belsham determined upon continuing at Daventry, as it may be presumed, much to the satisfaction of Dr. Ashworth and the friends of the institution.

The Rev. EDWARD PICKARD to the Rev.
THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ London, Nov. 25, 1772.

“Never, my dear nephew and friend, call your letters to me impertinent, nor think them troublesome. It gives me great pleasure to hear from you. I wish I deserved the good opinion you have of me. You have in me, if not a wise adviser, yet a faithful friend.

“The affair about which you now write is a very important one, and deserves your serious thought. There is one thing I am very clear in, that is, that you should lay it before Dr. Ashworth, whatever your determination may be. He will probably hear of it, and take it amiss that you do not inform him of it. He cannot be offended with Mr. Whitaker and the people of Leeds for proposing it to you. To conceal it from him, if you could, would but embarrass you. To consult with him is re-

spectful to him, and but justice to yourself. This, then, appears to me to be right. If you have any particular reasons to the contrary of more weight, let those determine you. To the affair itself what shall I say? You expect me to be free. I ought to be so; not to determine for you, but to help you to determine for yourself. Your own judgment, under a divine guidance, must do that. May you be thus guided!

“I take it for granted that you would not wish, at present, to change your situation. Your age renders it eligible. Your abilities for it are allowed by experience. The employment, I imagine, grows easier and pleasanter to you. It is a very respectable station, highly important and useful. You are improving yourself while you improve others. You run not the hazard you would do by fixing in a congregation. You may, after a few years, stand with greater weight at the head of a congregation. The place you are now in may not easily be filled up, if you quit it, so well as it now is. This is an important consideration. You have now two months in a year for relaxation. Nor are your circumstances such, nor, I trust, your temper, as to render an increase of salary the determining point. Perhaps every thing in your present station is not exactly, nor always, to your mind. If it is, you are singularly happy. But the question in this, and in every affair of life, will be, not which hath no difficulties or advantages, but which has fewest of the former, and most easily remedied; which hath most of the latter, and capable of being improved. And, you know, the difficulties we feel are always great-

est to us : those at a distance, though probable, yet are not certain. We are apt to flatter ourselves we may avoid them, nor do we apprehend their weight till we come to feel it.

“ And now let us take a journey to Leeds. I am not acquainted with the people there, and know not their number, nor the state of the congregation. I will suppose them to be peaceable, moderate, united. These are, to be sure, very important circumstances, the want of which would at once determine for the negative. What harmony there is between the two congregations, or whether a spirit of controversy may not be raised by some free publications on some points, I know not. It is probable there may ; and this I think of great consequence. A minister’s comfort and usefulness may be much affected by it. Mr. Whitaker hath a very worthy character. Upon his disposition and temper a good deal depends. These are hints for consideration, in order to forming a judgment. What influence Dr. Priestley’s removal from Leeds (I think it probable he will remove, as he is reconsidering a proposal made to him by Lord Shelburne) may have, I cannot say. The station there is to be sure very respectable. The salary is such as is not often to be met with. It is a pleasure to preach to a numerous congregation, as well as an opportunity of more extensive usefulness. But then you will consider, that it is constant service. Two sermons a week, visiting your people, &c., will require all your time and attention. The care of such a congregation—your age—your health—the expenses of living proportionate to the salary—

the uncertainty how far things may succeed to your wish—the honourable, the useful, the agreeable station you are in at present—these things, and more, I dare say occur to you. But I thought it might be useful to lay them before you in one view, that by comparing them, you might be able to form a more satisfactory judgment in so important an affair. I can scarce persuade myself to give you my opinion. But I will venture ; not to bias or determine for you, but as it may give you some ease in so weighty a matter. It is, that considering every thing as impartially as I can, my determination would be to continue at Daventry. But still, if your judgment be different, let that, for it should, determine. I pray the Father of lights, the Giver of wisdom to whom you seek, to guide and direct you.

“ I have wrote freely, because I esteem and love you, and know that you will make none but a proper use of this letter. You should have had it sooner, but when I had begun to write I was broke in upon, and prevented finishing. I am much concerned for the Doctor and his family. I hope to write to him this afternoon. I thank you for your concern about my wife. She is very poorly indeed, I wish I could say at all better. But God can restore her. He can give supports and comforts. To him we desire to resign. You have her affectionate love and best wishes. I am, dear Sir, your affectionate uncle and faithful servant,

“ E. PICKARD.”

Hitherto there has been little reason to suppose

that Mr. Belsham entertained any doubt of the truth of those doctrines in which he had been initiated from his youth ; but it is not surprising that a mind so discriminating as Mr. Belsham's should have had some suspicion that they were unscriptural, especially after he had been regularly engaged in the study of those points which constituted the leading articles of his faith. A departure from the dogmas of Calvin had been manifested by those who had been at the head of the institution in which Mr. Belsham now held a responsible situation, from the time of its commencement under the Rev. J. Jennings, and might be said to be more striking and decisive in Dr. Doddridge ; for his scheme of reconciling himself to the use of such expressions as were current among those who arrogated to themselves the title of orthodox, was but a thin veil to conceal the real heresy which marked his opinions. However his theory might satisfy his own scruples, and shelter him from that reproach to which he would have been exposed had his real sentiments been known, he did not altogether escape suspicion. Indeed, the In-dwelling scheme, as it has been denominated, which was that of Dr. Doddridge, differed in a very slight degree from Socinianism, or the purer form of doctrine which has assumed the name of Unitarianism ; and most of the phrases and expressions used by its advocates might be adopted by the latter class of believers, if they were accurately explained and defined. This scheme, which admits that Jesus was properly and strictly a man, assumes, that by virtue of an intimate union with God, described by

the expression of the Apostle, Col. ii. 9, “In him dwelleth *all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*,” Jesus was also strictly and properly God, and might be spoken of and addressed as such, and that prayer might be offered to him as a divine person, and assistance be expected from him ; indeed, that he might justly be regarded as God. The advocates of this opinion, amongst whom Dr. Doddridge was one of the earliest and most ingenious, seem to overlook the fact, that expressions of the same import, and as strong and decisive, are applied to *all Christians* ; as when the Apostle prays for the members of the church at Ephesus, (Ephes. iii. 19,) that they might be filled with *all the fulness of God*, and speaks of true believers as “coming in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the *fulness of Christ* ;” (ch. iv. 13 ;) as the Evangelist also had said, (John i. 10,) “Of *his fulness* have we also received, even grace for grace.” And the *unity* of Christ and God for which they contend, founded upon that very beautiful and interesting account of our Lord’s conversation with his disciples a little before his death, recorded in the 14—17th chapters of John’s gospel, is no other than what he asserted of himself and his disciples, and of God and them. The words of Jesus promising that he would not leave them comfortless, are, “At that day ye shall know, that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.” (John xiv. 20.) And in that affectionate prayer, which may be considered as the last which he offered for his disciples, are these remarkable expressions : “Neither pray I

for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be *one*, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be *one in us*, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be *one*, even as *we are one*; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in *one*, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me.” (John xvii. 20—23.) But this was a mode of interpretation which was never adopted by Mr. Belsham; and it will be seen at a later period, when his views and sentiments were more decidedly changed, that the transition from the opinions in which he had been educated was to Arianism, and finally to Unitarianism, without halting at all in those modifications of the doctrine of the Trinity by which he might be accounted one of its advocates.

The passage in his diary which suggested these observations is dated April 13th: “This evening, Messrs. Worthington, Dewhurst, Fawcet, Carpenter, Toms, and myself, entered into a solemn resolution that for the space of one year we would only use scriptural doxologies, each of us having some scruples about doxologies to the Spirit. I hope that God and his Spirit are my witnesses that I do it not from any disregard to the Holy Spirit, whose personality and agency upon the hearts of men, and especially of good men, I most thoroughly believe. But I would not be wise above what is written; and since there is not a single passage of scripture in which glory is ascribed to him, and we know

nothing of him, or the regards due to him, but by revelation, it is very dubious how far it is proper to ascribe them. I trust I can appeal to God that this is the only principle upon which I took up a resolution so contrary to all designs of popularity.” Mr. Belsham was little aware how much his faith in the doctrine of the Trinity was shaken when he thus doubted the propriety of any ascription of praise to the Holy Spirit; but as long as he continued to believe in the divinity of the Son, he would, as others do, retain an indistinct notion of the divinity, personality, and influence of the Holy Spirit. This latter doctrine has now scarcely any advocate but the decided Trinitarian, and the belief of the separate existence of the Spirit is silently dying away; for as the spirit of a man, in scripture phraseology, is the man himself, so the Spirit of God is God himself, and there are few Arians who admit the personality of the Holy Ghost as an article of their faith.

The diary continues in the same strain of eager aspiration after a heavenly temper, and love to the Saviour, with very little variation of thought, and even with a constant repetition of the same phraseology; and though the compiler of this Memoir wishes to give the public a faithful picture of Mr. Belsham’s mind and feelings, this purpose does not require that any further extract should be made until he notices the death of his aunt Pickard, which happened Sept. 2, 1773. He observes, “that she had been that day as well as usual, had taken an airing in the morning, was cheerful at supper, and after supper in the evening; but about eleven o’clock

she was seized with asthma, was bled without being relieved, and in a few minutes expired, without a struggle or a sigh." On this occasion Mr. Belsham addressed the following letter to his uncle :

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. E. PICKARD.

" DEAR AND HONOURED SIR,

"Shall I write this to condole or to congratulate? When I consider what a dear and excellent relative is removed, what a bright and amiable pattern of wisdom, piety, resignation, and of every grace and virtue that can adorn the Christian character is taken from us ; when I reflect upon the loss which the world in general, which her acquaintance and relations, and which you, dear Sir, in particular, have sustained ;—when I think how suddenly and unexpectedly she was snatched from us, at a time when we were ready to say, ' surely the bitterness of death is passed,' and fondly to flatter ourselves with the hope of enjoying her company for years to come, these circumstances affect me with the most sensible distress and sympathy, and I am ready to say,

' Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus
Tam chari capitis ?'

But when, on the other hand, I consider that she, who was lately an inhabitant of this dark vale of sin, mortality, and woe ; that she, who lately ' in this tabernacle groaned, being burdened,' whom we often saw oppressed, and almost overwhelmed under the infirmity and decay of animal nature, is now, by a short and easy transition, translated, rather let me call it, freed from this terrestrial clog, with all

its attendant incumbrances,—that she is now an active, joyful, and triumphant spirit, happy in the presence of her God and her Redeemer, in the society of saints and angels, and of many pious relatives, who were once tenderly dear to her in this imperfect state, and are now, like her, made perfect in holiness and glory, who can find in his heart to indulge any immoderate distress? Who can avoid saying, ‘Let us also go that we may die with her.’

“And surely could this happy spirit, which lately animated those dear remains over which we are now weeping, and which we are now consigning to the solitary mansions of the grave, be permitted to express its genuine sentiments, its language would be, ‘Weep not for me.’ No, Sir, let us rather ‘weep for ourselves,’ and rejoice in her happiness and glory. Allow me, dear Sir, to congratulate you, that she has already arrived at the end of her journey—has already finished her warfare, and received the glorious crown, while we are still struggling with the difficulties of the way, and stand exposed to the dangers of the field. O that we may be enabled to tread in the same path, to follow the same exalted leader, and then we need not fear but we likewise, in due season, shall receive the same glorious reward.

“I do not pretend, Sir, to give advice, or to suggest consolation to you. You have a better comforter, and better consolations than earth can yield, and are much more proper to give than to receive advice. Allow me only to say, that I sincerely sympathize with you under your heavy loss. I earnestly beg of God to support and comfort you, and to render these light, momentary afflictions the

happy means ‘of working out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.’

“ Dr. Ashworth informs me that he has invited and pressed you to come down to Daventry. I need not add, I cannot express the pleasure it would afford to me. I only fear it is too great a happiness for us to expect. I hope, nevertheless, that you will come, if you can make it convenient, and I cannot but think it would be of service to recruit your spirits. But be that as it may, I most cordially join with all who know you in hoping that you will use every possible means of preserving and continuing a life of such vast importance to multitudes. I am, honoured Sir, your dutiful nephew,
“ T. BELSHAM.”

“ *Daventry, Sept. 8, 1773.*”

How erroneous and mischievous must those opinions have been of the character and attributes of God, and of the nature and constitution of man, or its judgment of its own state and condition, which could lead a virtuous mind to indulge in such a statement and such criminations as are expressed in the following extracts !

“ Oct. 9th.—This being sacrament day, I staid this evening from meeting, as usual, and entered into a very serious and close examination into the state of my soul. I attempted this yesterday, after the devotional lecture, but great part of my time was engaged by company, and in the remaining part my thoughts were much confused, and I could do nothing to any purpose. This evening, I thank God, I was in a much better frame, and my atten-

tion was pretty close. Upon attentive consideration, I found the state of my heart much as I feared it would be. Instead of advancing in religion since the last solemn season of this kind, I fear lest I have declined. Indeed, I wish to God I knew whether there be any real religion at all. I am sure I have been very far from adhering to the good resolutions I have heretofore formed. My goodness, alas ! has been ‘as the morning cloud or the early dew.’ Upon serious examination into the state of my soul, I find in my heart a very strong propensity to sin. I seriously asked myself the important question, whether I would choose the service of sin or the service of God. I am ashamed to say, that I deliberated one moment about it ; still more so to acknowledge that my deliberation was long, and that at last I could hardly come to any resolution. In vain did I urge it upon myself, that I had nothing to tempt me to the service of sin but propensity—that I had found by experience that it yielded no pleasure—that the consequences of it were shame, remorse, and terror of conscience, present misery and eternal ruin ;—that, on the contrary, the service of God had every thing inviting—peace of conscience, triumph over irregular powers and propensities, friendship of God, guidance, protection, favour—every thing that could make a soul happy here and hereafter. I found myself unwilling to make the resolution for the service of God. I felt an inclination to put off the work till some convenient opportunity. But I asked myself, how I knew that that opportunity would ever come ? What would

become of me if I should die in this irresolute, unprepared frame? and I urged myself with that scripture, ‘To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.’ Still I found myself irresolute. I saw my folly and lamented it. This led my thoughts to reflect that I needed a better strength than my own. The question then occurred, Will God forgive? Will he afford assistance to so hardened a creature? These doubts were soon silenced by the question, If he is not willing to save, why did he send his Son to die? I wept over the obduracy of my heart, acknowledged the justice of my God in leaving me in so wretched a condition, but lifted up my heart in fervent ejaculation for divine help. I thought of the Saviour’s answer to St. Paul, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee.’ The thought revived and comforted me. I formed some feeble resolutions, and upon my knees I begged of God to confirm them. I begged God to pity, to pardon, and to enable me to carry my good resolutions into execution. The exercise has, I hope, upon the whole, been useful, at least in this view—it has informed me in some degree of the state of my soul, and that my resolutions for God are not so firm and determined as I could wish; yet, perhaps they may not be the less durable because mingled with fear. ‘Happy is the man that feareth always.’”

The following letter to Mrs. Healey, his eldest sister, evinces the kindness and affection of Mr. Belsham’s disposition, his piety and resignation, and the influence of religion upon his heart and feelings:

“MY DEAR, DEAR SISTER,

“I have just received the melancholy tidings of your dangerous illness and decline ; tidings which have struck a damp upon my spirits, such as I have not felt since that awful time which almost at one stroke deprived us of two of our nearest relatives. I thought it long since I had heard from Berkhamstead, but little did I guess the cause. I could not resist the desire of writing to you. It is perhaps the last opportunity I shall enjoy on this side heaven. Alas ! how do I know that this will reach you ? How do I know that this letter is not addressed to one who is already become a happy seraph, superior to human converse and all the concerns of mortality, who has bid an eternal adieu to a deceitful, a dangerous, and a calamitous world ? —deceitful indeed, whose most exalted pleasures perish just when we have begun to learn how to value and enjoy them. O my dear sister, how many pleasing hours have I spent in your company, and enjoying your friendship ! How many more did I hope still to spend ! I looked forward to future years, and promised myself repeated interviews, and in every interview increasing pleasure. I forgot that we lived in a dying world. I forgot ‘that in the midst of life we are in death,’ and that it was possible the last interview I enjoyed with you might be the last I should ever enjoy on earth. I fear that dear-bought experience will but too plainly prove the possibility of the melancholy case. But, blessed be God, though the separation will be painful, it will not be eternal, nor even of long continuance. I trust in the mercy of God and the

atonement of Christ, we shall shortly meet in heaven. O what a joyful meeting will that be ! What will it be to be free from sin and sorrow, pain and death ; to be perfect in holiness, in love, in glory ! —to enjoy the society of our friends and relatives who have arrived before us, and who are now free from all those spots and blemishes which would necessarily, at some seasons, embitter the intercourse of the tenderest friendship upon earth ! How delightful to enjoy the company of glorified spirits and angels ; to behold the glory of the Saviour, and to enjoy the favour of the great Jehovah, our covenant God, and to see him face to face, —to see as we are seen, and to know as we are known ! The very thought of this bliss fills me with delight, and I scarcely forbear envying you, my dear sister, who are just upon the verge of this felicity ; just dropping anchor in the port, while so many of us, are left tossing and struggling among the storms of life.

“ I am extremely glad to hear of the great composure and serenity of your mind in the present dark and painful scene. I trust that you will still be supported by God, that you will find him faithful to his covenant and promises, even if he lead you through the dark valley of the shadow of death, and that you will have reason to think honourably, and to speak well of him and of all his proceedings to the last hour of life. My most earnest prayers are offered for you. And let me beg of you, my dear sister, to pray earnestly for us, whom you are about to leave behind. Our case is the most pitiable. It is in vain that we represent to

ourselves, that the Eternal Sovereign has a right to do what he will with his own,—that his darkest paths are all wisdom, and faithfulness, and love,—that he only afflicts us for our good,—that he will lay no more upon us than he will enable us to bear,—that death only removes a true Christian from a world of sin and sorrow to a world of eternal happiness and glory. Human nature will have its course, and we cannot part with our dear and tender friends without feeling deeply. Pray for us, that we may be supported,—that we may not sorrow as those that are without hope,—and that our afflictions may be sanctified, and made the happy means of preparing us for a world where pious friends shall meet and never part, and God shall wipe all tears from our eyes.

But may I not indulge some pleasing hope of recovery? I would flatter myself that I may; but I dare not indulge the hope for fear of disappointment. How I long to see you! My present connexion renders it almost impossible. Dr. Ashworth has a dangerous attack of the gout, and his daughter is far gone in a deep consumption. The care of the family lies, in a great measure, upon me. I should be glad to hear of you every post; but I hope that Mr. Healey, or my sister Nancy, will write at least once a week, if it be but a single line. My love attends Mr. H. I sympathise deeply with him, and with little Nancy, who is not less to be pitied because she is too young to be sensible of her threatened loss. Adieu, my dear sister! May God bless and support you! He is all-sufficient, and

can do it ;—he is merciful and will do it. To him I most ardently commend you.

“ Your very affectionate and afflicted brother,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, Dec. 10, 1774.*”

There are few persons who have received early religious impressions, who do not regard the commencement of the year as a season which calls for the acknowledgment of dependence upon divine providence, and thankful recollection of divine mercy ; or who do not in some measure reflect upon their own conduct and form plans and resolutions for the future. This might be more particularly expected from one who made it almost his daily practice to acknowledge the universal presence and agency of God, and to examine his own temper and conduct. Mr. Belsham duly observed these seasons ; and entered into a more serious and deliberate investigation of his character and disposition ; endeavoured more accurately to mark his progress in virtue and religious attainment, or the want of it ; and to form new and more steadfast resolutions of circumspection, self-government, and diligence. This will be evident from the following extract from his diary :

“ Lord’s-day evening, Jan. 8.—The goodness of God has brought me to the beginning of a new year. Goodness and mercy have crowned the past. Life has been preserved ; health, and ease, and friends, and every comfort. I have not known an

interruption. I have enjoyed peculiar mercies. Religious privileges have been continued ; opportunities of secret and family worship, of public ordinances, and of attendance at the table of the Lord. I have not been detained from the house of God, even for one sabbath. ‘ Bless the Lord, O my soul ; all that is within me, bless his holy name !’

“ What have been my returns ? What, indeed, I am ashamed to acknowledge. I know not which most to wonder at, the continued, uninterrupted, increased mercies of God, or my own repeated, enormous, aggravated ingratitude, rebellion, and guilt. I am constrained to make the melancholy confession, that the last year has been spent in vain ; yea, worse than in vain. I find, upon serious consideration, that the habits of vice are stronger ; that the habits of religion and goodness are now weaker than at the beginning of the last year. Happy would it be for me if that year, with all its transactions, could be blotted out of existence. This is a very mortifying consideration, and fills me with great bitterness. But it is too true. God grant that I may never have cause to repeat this confession !

“ I have begun a new year: I would fain begin a new life. I would from this hour devote myself afresh to God and live to his glory, that if I should be cut off in the course of this year, as God knows I may, it may be said concerning me, at least for so many months or weeks, ‘ He lived to God ; and so it was his determined purpose to live, had those months and weeks been years or ages.’ ”

“ January, 12th.—I find, upon examination, that

the faults into which I am liable to fall are, carelessness and wandering in devotion ; a slow, slovenly way of doing business, and neglect to improve little portions of time ; irresolution, self-indulgence, and irregular appetites and passions. God knows with what weight these sins, some of them especially, hang upon my conscience, and how prone I am to fall into them. I have often made vows against them, and have as often broken those vows and resolutions. Yet still I would form new ones, in the presence of God, hoping that a merciful God and Saviour will now, at length, enable me to adhere to them.

“ For the better regulation of my conduct in the ensuing year, and, by the grace of God, through the remainder of life, I have formed the following resolutions, which, by the grace of God, I fully determine to carry into execution.

“ 1. I will be more regular and serious in my devotions. I will endeavour to set apart proper time for secret worship ; will not put it off on trifling occasions, nor crowd it into a corner of the day. I will strive to affect my heart by reading, meditation, self-examination, and prayer. In social worship I will strive to be more attentive, and will not indulge those roving thoughts to which I am so prone.

“ 2. I will strive to gain a better acquaintance with my own heart. In order to this, I will endeavour to examine myself every day, and to make the errors of one day the beacons of another. I will strive to be impartial and faithful to myself. I will embrace convenient seasons for a more solemn

and particular self-examination, and converse with God.

“3. I will read more devotional books than I have done of late years. I hope by this means to improve in religious knowledge, as well as in the divine life. I will endeavour to order matters so as to leave time for reading a sermon every morning, after private devotions. I have been very negligent in this business of late, and I suffer for it.

“4. I will be careful to avoid temptation. I will consider to what sins I am peculiarly exposed; in what circumstances I am most exposed. Against these I will endeavour to be peculiarly upon my guard. I will not provoke God by running into the way of temptation, in the way I have formerly done, by an insolent dependence upon peculiar advantages. I now feel the folly of this conduct. I will strive to avoid the very thought of sin. O God! thou knowest my frailty and depravity. O help me to fulfil this important, but difficult resolve!

“5. I will endeavour to practise self-denial and mortification. I will make a point of exercising myself to it, by denying myself what is agreeable, if it can be done with propriety.

“6. I will be more diligent in improving my time. I will be more resolute in the time of going to bed, and of rising. I will be careful to improve the many little slips of time, which there is so great temptation to waste. I will form my schemes regularly, and adhere to them with resolution.

“7. I will be temperate in eating and drinking. I will make it my business to govern my appetites and passions. I will dedicate myself to God. I

will cultivate universal holiness. I will endeavour to live every day as in the presence of God, and in the view of eternity.

“ ‘ And can a feeble, helpless worm
Fulfil a task so hard !
Thy grace must all the task perform,
And give the free reward.’ ”

WATTS.

Soon after the close of the session this year, a material change took place in the state of the Academy at Daventry, on account of the death of Dr. Ashworth; and an increased proportion of the business and management of the institution, for a time, devolved upon Mr. Belsham. The circumstances of Dr. Ashworth's illness and decease are detailed in a letter which Mr. Belsham addressed to his friend Mr. Bowden, who had received a unanimous invitation from the congregation at Call-lane, Leeds, to become assistant minister to Mr. Whitaker, who, being advanced in life, was desirous of being relieved from some part of the service, as pastor of so large a society. After offering his friend much judicious advice upon this subject, Mr. Belsham continues :

“ My brother and I arrived at Daventry last Friday se'nnight, the 14th inst., on our way to Bloxham. About half an hour before we came in, Dr. Ashworth was seized with a paralytic stroke, which deprived him of the use of his right side. We thought him in the agonies of death, but towards Saturday morning he grew better. He was sensible for about five minutes, and inquired for me. I went up stairs immediately. He sat up in his bed, looked earnestly in my face, and burst

immediately into a flood of tears ; but in two minutes' time became delirious again, and raved like a lunatic. I nevertheless ventured, in the afternoon, to go to Bloxham, and preached there on the sabbath-day, but on Monday morning was sent for back to Daventry. I found the Doctor alive, but in the agonies of death ; and about four o'clock on Tuesday morning, July 18th, he left this world of labour and suffering, and 'entered into the joy of his Lord ;' a great, a public, an almost irreparable loss. But such was the will of Him 'who doeth all things well,' and who best knows at what time it is most proper to call home his faithful servants, and crown their labours with an eternal reward. And why should we call the loss irreparable, when we consider the great Head of the church still lives to carry on his own cause and interest in the world, and that it is equally easy to him to work with the feeblest and meanest instruments, as with those which appear best qualified, most necessary, and which have actually been the most useful? Dr. Ashworth was a great and good man. He had his foibles, and so have we all. These will be buried in the dust, while his many and great excellencies will remain long engraven upon the hearts of survivors. May they ever remain engraven upon our hearts, and may it be our ambition to follow him in those respects in which he followed his Divine Master !''

During his illness, Dr. Ashworth had been attended by Dr. Stonhouse, and immediately on his decease Mr. Belsham acquainted that gentleman with the event.

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to Dr. STONHOUSE.

“ REV. SIR,

“ From the repeated accounts you have lately received from Daventry, it can be no surprise to you to hear that Dr. Ashworth has at last obtained dismissal from his labours and his sufferings, and is admitted ‘into the joy of his Lord.’ We found him on Friday evening as you foretold, in dying circumstances. Just before we arrived he was seized with a paralytic stroke, which deprived him of his senses, distorted his face, and took away the use of his right side. We did not expect him to live till morning, but he continued struggling, seemingly in great agony, and with very few intervals of sense, till a few hours before he died. At last, nature was quite exhausted, and he quietly sunk to his everlasting rest about four o’clock this morning, without a struggle or a groan. The last sensible words he was heard to utter were, ‘joy unspeakable.’ What that joy is, he now knows by transporting experience. He has been a wise, a faithful, and a successful labourer in the church of Christ, and we are ready to think it would have been better for the world and for the church if he had been spared a little longer ; but the thoughts of unerring wisdom are not like ours. The great Head of the church best knows when his servants have fulfilled their course, and when it is fit to call them home, and to bestow their reward. The church is safe in his hands, and rather than his own cause shall not finally prevail, ‘he will ordain praise out of the

mouths of babes and sucklings ;' and even 'from the stones will he raise up children to Abraham.'

"The Doctor's family, though greatly afflicted, are more composed than I could have expected. Miss P., of whom we were most apprehensive, was much affected, but does not appear materially worse. When she heard the melancholy news, she burst into tears, and these tears relieved her. Miss Ashworth and her brother have greatly injured their own health by their attendance upon their father, and by their anxiety about him. God will not suffer their filial tenderness and care to go unrewarded. They have not as yet felt the full weight of their loss. But I doubt not that God, who has supported them hitherto, when he calls them to further trials, will administer proportionable strength.

"This afflicted family unite with me in respectful compliments to yourself, your lady, and Miss Stonhouse. They think themselves greatly indebted to you for that great tenderness and concern you have manifested towards their deceased father.—I remain, Rev. Sir, your obedient and much-obliged servant,

"T. BELSHAM.

"*Daventry, Tuesday, July 18, 1775.*"

Dr. Ashworth's funeral sermon was preached to a very crowded audience by the Rev. Thomas Robins, at that time minister of the congregation at West Bromwich. On this gentleman Mr. Coward's Trustees had fixed their thoughts, as the successor to the late Tutor at Daventry, and he was eventually induced to accept the office, though at

first greatly averse to listen to any proposals on the subject. In a letter to Dr. Furneaux, dated Bedford, August 1st, who was at that time one of the Trustees, Mr. Belsham thus expresses himself:

“I am extremely glad to find the congregation at Daventry so unanimously concur with you in the application to Mr. Robins. I sincerely wish he may regard it as a call of Providence to the important charge, and that as such he may cheerfully comply with it; but I am not without my fears lest his diffidence and excessive humility should overbalance all, and disappoint our pleasing hopes. May the great Head of the church direct the measures pursued, and overrule all to the advancement of his own interest in the world!

“I shall gladly concur in every measure that may be thought advisable in present critical circumstances, rejoicing if I can be in the least instrumental to promote a cause which appears to me so nearly connected with the interests of truth, liberty, and religion.”

In a letter to the Rev. Thomas Halliday, formerly Classical Tutor at Daventry, written a few months after Dr. Ashworth's death, Mr. Belsham says, “In concurrence with the Rev. Job Orton, Dr. Ashworth had strongly recommended Mr. Robins to the Trustees of Coward's fund, as his successor. Application was accordingly made to him immediately and vigorously. After long deliberation and great hesitation, Mr. Robins accepted the call, and has now been fixed with us three months. His temper is so amiable and engaging as to render him universally beloved. His genius and furniture are

undoubtedly considerable. What his learning is, I cannot tell. My principal objection to him was his age. I thought he had too little time before him. But he seems to enjoy good health, and bids fair for long continuance. In every other respect he is perfectly suitable, and we are very happy with him."

It appears from the date of this letter, that Mr. Robins entered upon his office in the autumn of 1775. Mr. Belsham succeeded him in 1781 ; so that Mr. Robins presided at the head of this institution only for the short space of six years. In that part of his diary where Mr. Belsham cursorily speaks of Mr. Robins, he says, "with whom I continued on the very best terms till the year 1778, when I removed to Worcester." At a subsequent period, when Mr. Belsham returned to Daventry, as successor to Mr. Robins, who continued to reside there, he kept up a close and friendly intercourse with him, often consulting him upon subjects of importance and interest, and communicating with him at all times in the most unreserved and affectionate manner ; and perhaps there was no person who had a higher sense of Mr. Belsham's abilities, excellencies, and virtues, than Mr. Robins. It was highly gratifying to the writer to be a member of this gentleman's family during four years that he resided at Daventry, and he is happy in this opportunity of adding his testimony to the high character which he justly bore in the estimation of all his friends and acquaintance. Mr. Robins' knowledge was extensive and accurate, especially upon subjects of theology ; and his mode of expressing himself

was natural, clear, and easy, so that he distinguished himself as a lecturer, by the facility and precision with which he conveyed his ideas to his pupils. As a preacher he was popular, and his devotional services were exceedingly admired. There was a seriousness, earnestness, and pathos in them, which particularly engaged the attention, and interested the hearts of those who joined in them, and which shewed how much his own was affected by the sentiments which flowed from it. This excellent man was laid aside from the ministry, and from his office of tutor, by the failure of his voice; but he still retained his station among his brethren, and was regarded by them with great respect. His many virtues, his amiable disposition, and his conciliating manners, secured the veneration and affection of all who were admitted to his acquaintance.

About this time much alarm had been excited in the neighbouring congregations, particularly at Kettering, on account of some supposed heresy which had manifested itself in the sentiments and preaching of a few of the ministers. This gave birth to the expression of much bigotry and persecuting zeal, and not a little disturbed the harmony which had hitherto prevailed in these societies. It has already appeared, that Mr. Belsham had been early taught to make the Scriptures his only guide in faith and practice; and he was little disposed to countenance the assumption of inquisitorial power, or the exercise of that authority which Christ had forbidden even to his chosen apostles. The ministers of Northamptonshire and the neighbouring

counties had formed themselves into an association, and held half-yearly meetings for religious services, in rotation, at the places where each minister resided. This year, (Oct. 4th) the appointed place of meeting was at Rothwell, in Northamptonshire, and Mr. Belsham was invited to address his brethren upon the occasion. He considered this a proper opportunity of animadverting upon a spirit which he thought so contrary to that of the Christian, and chose for his subject, Rom. x. 2: "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Though he was one of the junior members of the association, it is a striking proof of the estimation and respect in which he was held, and of the propriety and judgment with which he discussed the subject, that a discourse which was evidently intended to apply to existing circumstances, was so attentively heard and candidly received, that he was urged by the congregation, and by the ministers, to commit it to the press, to which he reluctantly consented.

As this is the first of Mr. Belsham's publications, and is in the hands of very few, a short sketch of the plan and sentiments of this sermon may be acceptable to the reader.

In describing the nature of a blind and misguided zeal, "a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge," Mr. Belsham applies the term "to zeal which is exercised upon improper objects; to a zeal for certain speculative opinions, some of which are false, absurd, and blasphemous; others are matters of doubtful disputation; and others, again, though true, are above comprehension, and have but little

influence upon the practice.” Under this head Mr. Belsham expresses himself with a boldness and liberality, which shewed how much he acted upon those principles of fearless examination, of a love of truth, and of candid acknowledgment of human fallibility and error, in which he had been early initiated.

“Some persons,” he observes, “are exceedingly attached to MYSTERY; they are ever curiously, not to say presumptuously, prying into the unfathomable deep of divine counsels, and are pleased with nothing but what they cannot comprehend. Now, whatever truth there may be in these sublime doctrines, which surpass the comprehension of reason, it is certain, that so far as they are unintelligible they cannot possibly direct our practice, and therefore to lay any great stress upon them, and especially upon any peculiar and unscriptural mode of explaining or expressing them, is certainly expressing zeal upon improper objects, and brings us under the censure of the text.

“Many persons discover great zeal in their attachment to certain learned and excellent men, and entertain so high a veneration for their judgment, that they are ready to adopt even their errors, and to anathematize those who rank themselves under a different name, or refuse to acknowledge any other master than Christ. Thus in the Corinthian church, ‘one said, I am of Paul; another, I of Apollos; and another, I of Cephas.’ And this spirit is far from being lost, even in the present age, and in the Protestant world. That considerable deference should be paid to the opinions of great, and wise,

and good men, is undoubtedly just. But to adopt opinions not founded in Scripture, merely on their authority, and to follow them implicitly in all their notions, without considering that even the wisest and best of men are liable to error, is truly and literally a blind, misguided zeal, and directly opposes the command of our Saviour, to ‘call no man master upon earth.’”

“Another instance of misguided zeal, similar to the last, is, when men enlist themselves under the banners of any religious SECT or PARTY, are determined at all events to embrace and support all its particular modes and tenets, and are solicitous for the welfare and growth of that particular denomination, as a distinct object, without an ultimate view to the general advantage of the church, or the interest of religion in the world. We, for example, profess to be Dissenters from the Established Church. I hope we are Dissenters upon principle; rational, steady, and zealous. But if any of you are zealous for the Dissenting interest as such, merely because it happens to be your own party, and separate from any connexion it may have with the interest of truth, of Christ, and of religion in the world, I must tell you plainly, my friends, that your zeal is in this instance exercised on an improper object, and brings you under the censure of the text, ‘that you have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.’”

After pursuing this subject in some further instances, Mr. Belsham adds, “A man falls justly under this censure, when his zeal is exercised

upon proper objects, but in an IMPROPER DEGREE—and when it exceeds the bounds of Christian CHARITY and CANDOUR.

“The great truths and duties of our holy religion deserve much more zeal than is generally exercised upon them, and in regard to our own faith and practice we cannot be too zealous for them. We ought likewise zealously to recommend them to others; but here our zeal must be mingled with love and governed by prudence. If it proceed so far as to cause us to do ill, or to speak ill, or even to wish ill, to any of our fellow-creatures, whatever be its object or pretence, it is so far a blind, misguided zeal.”

In pointing out “the numerous evils and pernicious effects of it,” he states, “that such zeal is in itself highly criminal—is attended with bad consequences to the zealot himself—grieves the spirits of the ministers of Christ, and often greatly injures their usefulness—and has often been the cause of great divisions and distractions in the church.

“I will be hold to say, that most, perhaps all the animosities, the contentions, the divisions, the persecutions, which have existed in the Christian church from the earliest ages, and all the deluges of blood which have been spilt upon a religious account, have arisen from this source.

“What caused the Jews to crucify the Lord of Glory? A zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. What urged Saul the persecutor to ‘breathe out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord’? It was ungovernable zeal. What

excited the Christians, in the earlier ages of the church, ‘to bite and to devour one another,’ and to shed the blood of millions for nothing but names, and forms, and speculative opinions? A misguided and intemperate zeal.”

——“But why, my friends, do I lead back your thoughts to barbarous ages and to distant nations, to behold the sad effects of intemperate and misguided zeal? For this purpose I need but refer to the present age—to your native country—and would to God that I could not add, to your own neighbourhood too. Let the melancholy schisms and breaches in our churches—let the emptiness of those places which were once thronged with serious and attentive hearers—let the coldness and reserve between those who were once united in the strictest bonds of Christian love and affection—let the anxiety and dejection which appear upon the countenances of your ministers—let these declare the sad effects of that zeal of God which is not according to knowledge.” He adds,

“Intemperate and misguided zeal injures the cause of religion. It brings contempt upon her real friends, amongst those who will not be at the pains of separating the chaff from the wheat. It likewise gives men a very unfavourable impression of religious principles. For when they see the professors of religion, instead of becoming more humane, tender, and benevolent, only growing more proud, uncharitable, and churlish, they are naturally led to conclude, that such a religion cannot be the offspring of a God whose name is LOVE, and that they are safe enough without it.”

He concludes by suggesting “some hints of advice to those who are under the influence of a blind, intemperate zeal.” — “In order to regulate your zeal, improve your KNOWLEDGE, and attend more to the PRACTICE of RELIGION. Look well at home. Let the main current of your zeal be directed thither. There it will find scope enough. Let it be the object of your ambition and zeal to be found established, judicious Christians ; faithful, zealous, and eminent servants of your great Master.”

The concluding address “to those who are not yet tainted with this unchristian spirit,” evinces the correctness of his judgment, and the modesty and candour, as he had before shewn the firmness and sincerity, with which he presumed to address his brethren.

“Avoid the first approaches to intemperate, misguided zeal. Never give way in the least instance to a captious, querulous, censorious, uncharitable temper. You know not how fast it may grow upon you. ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged.’ Be candid and kind even to those who are under the influence of a blind, intemperate zeal. We are too apt to consider those who shew no candour, as deserving none ; and are too ready to exclude the uncharitable from a share in our charity ; but remember, that though the zeal of such be without knowledge, it is nevertheless a zeal of God. This does not entirely remove, but it greatly extenuates the guilt. Make every possible allowance for unavoidable ignorance and prejudice. When reviled, pray ; and when persecuted, bless.

“Let not the mistaken zeal of others abate your

true and enlightened zeal for the interests of real religion. No; let it rather increase it; and endeavour to illustrate by your own bright and amiable example, the difference between a blind, rash, misjudging zeal, and a warm, lively, active, judicious, and evangelical zeal for the glory of God and the interests of religion. Most sincerely sorry should I be, if any thing that has been offered should have the least tendency to discourage such a zeal **AS THIS**. This is the farthest from my intention; and my last and most earnest advice is, **BE ZEALOUS**. Be zealous for the honour of God—be zealous for the cause of Christ—be zealous for the interest of religion—be zealous for the happiness of your fellow-creatures—be zealous for the salvation of your immortal souls.”

Mrs. Healey recovered from the illness mentioned in a former letter, (p. 97,) but the return of her disorder greatly alarmed her friends. Mr. Belsham's attachment to his sister, and his sympathy in the fears and apprehensions of his family, drew from him the expression of his kind affection, of his fond though feeble hope of restoration to better health, and his pious and fervent wish that, if this hope were disappointed, the suffering invalid might be strengthened and supported in that awful hour which puts a period to all the enjoyments and affections of this mortal state.

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to Mrs. HEALEY.

“MY DEAR SISTER,

“I was exceedingly sorry, when at Bedford, to hear so unfavourable an account of your health, and

am very anxious to know how you are. I would fain hope that the return of the symptoms of your disorder is merely temporary, and that when the weather, which has of late been very (severe), becomes more favourable, you will grow better. Nevertheless, from the account you give of yourself, I cannot but entertain some dark apprehensions, and this makes me more solicitous to hear from you or Mr. Healey, a pleasure I have not enjoyed for many months. 'The clouds seem to be returning after the rain,' but I hope that the good providence of God will once more disappoint our fears and restore the sunshine of health and ease. I suppose my mother has been to visit you: she told me she intended it. No doubt she has desired you to return to Bedford. I cordially urge your acceptance of the invitation. At Bedford you will breathe your native air. There you have a tender mother and a skilful apothecary, and you have received great benefit there before. Every circumstance concurs to recommend it. May a wise and good God, the only physician of value, direct and prosper! He brings to the gates of death, and he only can say, 'Return.' Diseases are his servants. He saith to one, 'Go, and it goeth; and to another, Come, and it cometh.' May he rebuke the disorder and confirm the recovery! How happy is it, my dear sister, to think that we are in the hands of infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness; at the disposal of a Being 'who doeth all things well'! His dispensations are often dark and intricate. 'His paths are in the deep waters.' We cannot see, and we find it hard to believe, his faithfulness and love.

But let us wait his appointed time. ‘Let faith and patience have their perfect work.’ He is the God of Israel and the Saviour. He is ever mindful of his covenant, and does not forget his servants in their affliction. Underneath them are his everlasting arms. All things work together for good. He chasteneth with a father’s hand, and with a father’s heart ; not for his pleasure, but for our profit. The day is coming when all shall be cleared up. Every mystery shall be unravelled. What a blissful employment in yonder blissful world to explore the abyss of providence, and to see the mercy and faithfulness of all ! In the mean time, let us learn to trust ; to cast all our care and burden upon the Lord ; to acquiesce in all his will ; to believe that all he doeth is well. How delightful is it to have our wills conformable to the will of God ; to resign ourselves and all our dearest comforts into his hands ! I am sure you strive after this happy state of mind. God grant that you may attain it in the greatest perfection ! To die is a very serious thing, and it is peculiarly melancholy when ‘the sun goeth down while it is yet day.’ But our times are in the hands of God, and his time is the best. We live in an afflicted and dangerous world, and they are the happiest who are soonest sheltered in regions of glory and immortality.

“I wish much to see you. It is not easy to tell you how much I am mortified that I had no opportunity for it last summer ; but you know what my engagements were. After Dr. Ashworth’s death, almost the whole care of the Academy devolved upon me, till within these few weeks that Mr.

Robins has been among us, so that I have hardly had time for necessary recreation and exercise. Adieu, my dear sister; may you enjoy the best supports and consolations, and long live to pay your vows to the God of your health and the length of your days.—Yours, &c.,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.

“*Daventry, Nov. 8, 1775.*”

The state of Mrs. Healey's health grew worse during the winter and the ensuing spring. Her disorder, indeed, was too far advanced to admit of any reasonable hope of recovery or amendment. The following intimation from his mother, in a letter dated Jan. 17, 1776, prepared Mr. Belsham to expect that event which she had soon to announce:

“I am glad you had so pleasant a visit in town; but mourn you had no hours for Berkhamstead. I inclose you the last letter I shall ever receive from Mrs. Healey, and shall be glad to have it returned when you write. I had a letter from Mr. Healey yesterday, with a very bad account of her—worse in every respect; and Dr. Addington gives it as his opinion, that it is a lost case. But I thank God she enjoys a mind entirely resigned to the Divine will—life or death, as He pleases. I am much concerned for her:—what a loss will she be to her husband, to her child, and to me! But may I say, ‘Thy will be done.’”

Mrs. Belsham's next letter to her son, dated Feb. 22nd of the same year, confirmed these mournful tidings.

“ I received the inclosed letter from Berkhamstead to-day, and, as I had a frank directed to you, could not satisfy myself without sending it. I do not know your engagements, nor do I pretend to direct your conduct ; but if any after reflection should arise in your mind, that, had you known her situation, you would have gone, I could not forgive myself for concealing any thing from you that you would have wished to have known. I only say, what is done must be done soon. Her strength wears away apace, and she will soon bid adieu to this vale of tears. I adore the goodness of God in giving her such resignation to his will, and such fortitude in the near views of eternity. May she abundantly evidence the truth and power of that religion she has long professed ! I do not wonder my poor child does not wish to converse with the clergy of B. She has been taught in a different manner, and now more than ever distinguishes the difference of heart-felt piety and form. I would not be uncharitable, but I am more and more attached to the Dissenters.”

A few weeks terminated the sufferings of this excellent lady, as appears from the following communication :

Mrs. BELSHAM to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“ MY DEAR SON,

“ Last night a messenger from Mr. Healey brought me the melancholy news of your sister’s death. It was, I doubt not, an unspeakable mercy to her.— And is she not now singing the praises of her God and Saviour, who has removed her from this world,

of sin and sorrow to a world of joy and happiness? But may we not mourn our own loss? Have we not lost a most affectionate relation, and a much valued friend? Have not my mercies been taken from me many times?—But I do not repine. I have many left—many more than I deserve. May my will be brought into an entire submission to the will of God, and I desire to say, ‘he doeth all things well.’ May the death of our friends quicken us in our preparation for our great change. Mine cannot be far off. May you long live a successful minister of Jesus Christ, that whenever it does come, you may finish your course with joy. William and Nancy intend going to Berkhamstead on Wednesday, to pay their last respects to their sister. You will excuse my writing a longer letter, and believe me to be, as I really am, your ever affectionate mother, &c., &c.,

“ A. BELSHAM.

“ *March 26, 1776.*”

Mr. Belsham’s services were frequently called for by the neighbouring ministers, and in London, which he occasionally visited. His abilities and qualifications as a preacher were therefore well known and justly estimated. It is not extraordinary, that repeated applications were made to him to undertake the charge of a congregation. It appears, from a letter addressed to his friend, the Rev. Hugh Worthington, Jun., that he had received from him an intimation of a design to invite him to become the assistant of Dr. Prior, of Ayliffe Street, and some advance was made to Mr. Pickard for

this purpose. Mr. Belsham, at all times, was extremely averse to offer himself as a candidate, and would on no account place himself in opposition to another minister, to whom the thoughts and wishes of a congregation were directed, even though it might appear probable, that a majority of the leading persons in the society were in his favour. From information communicated by his uncle, Mr. Belsham learnt, that a respectable gentleman, the Rev. — Waters, who had been educated at Hoxton Academy, was very acceptable to a number of the subscribers at Ayliffe Street Chapel, and on this account he desired “that his name might not be mentioned any more in that connexion.” In reply to Mr. Pickard, he says, “It is never my intention to appear any where as a rival candidate, nor to thrust myself upon a divided people. I have known but too many instances in which a minister has met with trouble in a congregation where his invitation has not been perfectly unanimous.” In a subsequent letter he adds, “I could not bear to preach in a place, where I knew that many would hear me with prejudice. I could never think of accepting a merely partial invitation ; and it seems little less than madness to leave a safe and pleasant harbour to launch into a dangerous and stormy sea. I hope I shall, at any time, be willing to sacrifice ease to usefulness ; but the present occasion does not seem to call for it.”

The impression which the report of this intended application to Mr. Belsham from the society at Ayliffe Street produced, may be inferred from the following passage in a letter from his friend, the

Rev. J. Fuller, late Assistant Tutor at Daventry, but at that time minister of the congregation at Enfield. “I hear from Mr. Tayler, what for my own sake and yours I wish may come to pass, that you are likely to have an invitation to Ayliffe Street. I should rejoice in having you so near a neighbour, and in your burdens being lightened; but, my dear friend, what will become of the Academy? Mr. Tayler is alarmed in the highest degree at the consequence of your leaving it. He thinks there would be the greatest probability of Mr. Robins’ resignation, and desired that I would use all my influence with you, to induce you to give a negative to any proposal of removing which may be made at present. I told him, that I thought myself an improper person to say any thing upon this head, as whatever came from me would come with an ill grace, though I am sensible that your removal would be attended with infinitely worse consequences than mine can be. He said, he hoped you would see it clearly to be your duty to stay, at least a year or two longer; that you need not fear at any time having an agreeable congregation; that he thought you would prefer a country to a London settlement; but that if you had imbibed strong prejudices in favour of the latter, Carter Lane should at any time be at your service, and he would hold it for you as long as you pleased, or till it was convenient for you to leave Daventry. He said, he felt for you in your present situation; he knew it must be very disagreeable, but hoped you would be inclined to prefer the utile to the dulce for a little while longer. He came to me to Enfield to say all

this, and a great deal more to the same effect. I promised to relate the conversation faithfully, which I have done. I am sure, if you leave Daventry soon, I shall most heartily repent of having come to Enfield, should my removal at all influence you to such a step. I see the importance of your continuance in the strongest light. Excuse me: I do not mean to dictate, or even to give advice. I am well persuaded you will not act but in a manner which appears to you quite right. May you in this, and in every other affair of importance, have the best direction.”

This business had scarcely been disposed of, when Mr. Belsham received an invitation from the congregation at Worcester to favour them with his services for a few Sundays, with a view to a further application to him to become their minister. ‘This proposal Mr. B. was obliged to decline; but his friends at Worcester were not easily discouraged, as appears from the following letter :

DR. JAMES JOHNSTONE to the Rev. THOMAS
BELSHAM.

“REV. AND DEAR SIR,

“The Congregation in this place is so very unanimously hearty in wishing you to be their pastor, that they are determined not to relinquish their expectations of you, as long as there is the most distant prospect of bringing you here. Your letter has been shewn to all the trustees, members, subscribers, &c., who are every one of them solicitous for another application to you.—They have desired me to write to you upon the subject, and to say, that

they will be perfectly satisfied with your continuance at Daventry so long as it is either necessary to Mr. Robins, or agreeable to yourself. In the mean time, they will cheerfully find supplies and wait your own convenience, if you would promise to come here, whenever you leave your present situation.

“ While I am writing by commission from the congregation, I cannot help joining my own fervent wishes, that they may succeed in this application. It would give me sincere pleasure to have so valuable a friend in this neighbourhood; but this consideration, great as it is, should not influence me to be pressing with you on this occasion, if I were not well persuaded, that Worcester is a situation in which you have the fairest prospect of promoting the cause of religion and virtue, and of serving the Dissenting interest in particular. The candour and unanimity of the people is such as to be highly agreeable to a Minister. I hope you will take the matter into serious consideration. It is pity that they have been so long in a state of uncertainty, and there is some danger lest repeated discouragements should damp that zeal which they have hitherto discovered in the cause.

“ You will oblige me very much by writing your unreserved sentiments upon this head. I will take care to communicate to the congregation all you desire, and no more. Pray give my very respectful compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Robins. I remain, most truly, your sincere friend,

“ J. JOHNSTONE.

“ *Worcester, Sept. 14, 1776.*”

This second invitation drew from Mr. Belsham the following reply :

The Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM to Dr. JAMES JOHNSTONE.

“ MY DEAR FRIEND,

“ In the first application I was favoured with from Worcester, it was very properly desired, that I would spend two or three sabbaths there, as a kind of trial, how it might suit. I took it for granted, that my declining to comply with this request, so extremely reasonable in itself, would naturally be considered as giving up all expectation of any further proceeding. I accordingly dropped all further thoughts of the affair, and spoke of it in this view to Mr. Urwick. Little did I think that it would be renewed again ; much less could I ever form an idea of a proposal so uncommonly respectful and obliging as that contained in your letter. I confess it staggered my resolution, and this is the true and only reason why you have not heard from me before. I kept you and my friends at Worcester in suspense no longer than I was in suspense myself. I should be exceedingly sorry that my delay should lay me under any suspicion of being deficient in respect to those from whom I have met with such peculiar civility and friendship.

“ If I were now at liberty from all engagements at Daventry, I should with pleasure embrace the offer from Worcester. But I cannot possibly quit my present situation till next summer, nor am I certain that I could remove then. It would be wrong to keep the congregation so long vacant ;

nor should I, on the other hand, choose to engage myself so long before. Whatever other objections I have against removing to Worcester are comparatively small. On this account, therefore, principally, I beg leave finally to decline the invitation, with the warmest thanks to all my friends there for their kind partiality and undeserved respect, sincerely and affectionately commending them in all their ways to the direction and blessing of Him whose providence superintends all, and whose wisdom and goodness orders all things well.

“ Your ever affectionate friend and servant,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ *October 23, 1776.*”

This invitation was followed, the next year, by a proposal to become the assistant minister at Walthamstow. This was a situation which to many would have had peculiar attractions, on account of the high character and extensive learning of the stated minister, the Rev. Hugh Farmer; the intercourse with so many respectable families and individuals to which such a connexion would introduce his coadjutor; and the vicinity of Walthamstow to London. These were not unduly estimated by Mr. Belsham; but the principle by which he was uniformly actuated made him almost indifferent to every thing which did not hold out the prospect of usefulness; and his modest and humble views of himself, and of his style and mode of composition, made him doubtful how far his services would be acceptable to a society so refined and intelligent as that at Walthamstow. He had at all times a strong

objection to place himself in the situation of a competitor, which he justly considered as beneath the character of a Christian minister, and generally productive of consequences fatal to his usefulness and success as a teacher with one part of the society, who must feel, if they do not resent, the disappointment to which they are subjected by the rejection of their favoured candidate. Mr. Belsham was brought forward on this occasion by his friend Mr. Jacomb. In a letter addressed to his son, Mr. Robert Jacomb, he says,

“ I should be very happy in a connexion with a person of Mr. Farmer’s great ability and worth ; but what the mode of that connexion is to be, and to a multitude of other items, which, though unnecessary to be mentioned, are important to be considered, I am a perfect stranger.”

“ —Upon the whole, I am greatly at a loss what to think, having so few grounds on which to form a judgment. I must leave it entirely to Mr. Jacomb’s discretion, whether my name shall be mentioned, on an approaching occasion, or not. If there be not a reasonable prospect of acceptance and usefulness ; if there be a probability of any considerable opposition ; or if the views of the congregation be already directed to some other person ; in either of these cases, I am sure he will think it to the last degree improper to mention me. Indeed, I place that confidence in Mr. Jacomb’s judgment and perfect knowledge of the state of the society, that I entertain no doubt that he will do what is proper, and shall be perfectly satisfied with whatever steps he may think fit to take.”

In writing to his uncle, (April 24th,) of whose experience and advice Mr. Belsham availed himself in this, as in other instances, after detailing the particulars of his letter to Mr. Jacomb, he says,

“I shall be happy if my conduct meet with your approbation. For my own part, I wish that my name may not be mentioned at all, unless there be a prospect of my removing thither; and I am a little apprehensive, if I should go, there might not be that mutual correspondence between the disposition and character of minister and people, which is so essential to mutual happiness. You, Sir, are acquainted with both, and can form the best judgment. I place so much confidence in you, that I shall be perfectly satisfied with any step that may be taken under your direction. If you think proper that the affair should be wholly dropped, I beg the favour of you to take what measures you think fit for that purpose.”

This affair seems to have been some time in agitation; for a month after the date of his former letter, he addressed his uncle as follows:

The Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM to the Rev.
EDWARD PICKARD.

“DEAR AND HONOURED SIR,

“I am exceedingly obliged by your information and advice, as well as by your care and trouble on my account. I believe I shall by-and-by begin to be proud of my own judgment, by finding it so entirely coincident with yours. Relying wholly on your information in regard to Dr. Price and Mr. Simpson, I see no impropriety in preaching at

Walthamstow, on the day you mention (June 15), and I hope, therefore, to do myself the pleasure of waiting upon you on the 14th, perhaps pretty early in the afternoon. I do not know whether it will be expected that I should preach twice or only once; i. e., in the afternoon. It will be best to be ‘in utrumque paratus.’ My expectations are far from being raised very high. I see difficulties and objections which I cannot solve, myself, and which I should be very glad to talk over with you and Mr. Jacomb. I do indeed think the salary proposed, small. I know that gain is not my object; but I do wish to live decently, as I have been always used to live, and as in my present circumstances I may and do. I know not the distinction in London between an assistant and an afternoon preacher. Upon the whole, my ignorance of circumstances is still so great, that I know not what judgment or expectation to form: on the spot it will be much easier to know and to determine.

“I shall continue to be very thankful for your advice and prayers. I wish to know and to pursue the path of duty, and feel my need of the assistance of the Father of lights. I would follow the leadings of his providence and spirit, and leave events to him.—I remain, dear and honoured Sir, your dutiful and obliged nephew,

“T. BELSHAM.

“*May 29, 1777.*”

It does not appear whether Mr. Belsham officiated at Walthamstow on the day mentioned or not. It is evident, however, that he saw reason to de-

cline the connexion. Immediately on his return from London he thus expresses his decision, in writing to Mr. Pickard:

“I thank you for your information concerning Walthamstow. Were my apprehensions of the case ever so different from yours, I should cheerfully submit to your better judgment, and superior acquaintance with the world ; but in this affair I most cordially coincide with you, and therefore, in pursuance of your advice, as well as of my own inclination and judgment, I beg the favour of you, Sir, to take some convenient opportunity of informing those gentlemen of Walthamstow, who think of nominating me as successor to Mr. Radcliffe, that I am very sensible of their candour and respect, but that, for particular reasons, I beg leave entirely to decline the affair, and request that my name may not be mentioned.”

In writing to his friend, William Jacomb, Esq., acknowledging his kindness, and that of other gentlemen who wished to propose him as successor to Mr. Radcliffe, Mr. Belsham expresses himself in a similar manner, and concludes with “an earnest wish and prayer, that the great Head of the church may direct the choice of the society to a man after his own heart, who, walking in the steps of their present worthy pastor, may feed them with knowledge and understanding, may be eminently successful in forming the minds of many for wisdom, piety, and everlasting happiness, and who may stand approved by the chief Shepherd at the great day of his final appearance.”

While this affair was pending, the society at

Worcester were urging their request that Mr. Belsham would become their minister; and it is a decisive proof of the respect and popularity which he had acquired, that application was made for his services from so many quarters, and from societies of such influence and importance among the Dissenters. The wishes of his friends at Worcester were communicated through Dr. James Johnstone.

Dr. JAMES JOHNSTONE to the Rev. THOMAS
BELSHAM.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“I am again desired by the Congregation here to address you on their behalf. They are still earnestly wishing to bring you amongst them; and most of them are of opinion, that no other person will so effectually serve the cause of religion, and keep up the Dissenting interest in this place so well as yourself.

“The Trustees met on Friday evening last, and would have agreed on an immediate invitation to you, but were apprehensive of its having a bad effect, if you should still be so far engaged to Mr. Robins as to render their application *fruitless*. For this reason I am requested to ask you whether there is a probability of your being able to leave Daventry this summer, and at the same time to inform you, that this people is ready to take the earliest opportunity of sending you a unanimous and cordial invitation to settle among them, and that their hopes of *union* rest principally upon you.

“I shall be much obliged to you for an answer as soon as you can conveniently send it; and remain, with true regard, your sincere friend and humble servant,

“J. JOHNSTONE.

“*Worcester, June 1, 1777.*”

To this Mr. Belsham replied, with his usual candour and ingenuousness, “that though not absolutely determined against leaving Daventry, he was so far entangled in another affair, as to be unable to attend to any other proposal, and that though he did not apprehend the affair before him would be suitable on either side, the probable consequence would be his continuance at Daventry for a year at least.” The society at Worcester was not discouraged by this intimation, but determined to make a further application to Mr. Belsham, of which intention he received the earliest information from his friend.

DR. JAMES JOHNSTONE to the Rev. THOMAS
BELSHAM.

“*Worcester, June 28, 1777.*”

“MY DEAR SIR,

“I am sorry to hear that there is so formidable a rival as Walthamstow, in the way of our expectations of having you here.

“There is an invitation from this congregation now drawn up, and at this moment circulating through the society to be signed; it will be subscribed by every member and subscriber belonging to the congregation before to-morrow night, and

will be sent off on Monday night, by the post. However, I am not willing to lose any time in applying to you, and therefore send you this previous notice. A new subscription has been set on foot, which we have reason to expect will enable us to offer you one hundred pounds a year ; but I will give an exact account of this affair in the letter which will accompany the invitation. You must excuse me writing more now ; I am much engaged, and have only time to add my earnest entreaty, that you will think seriously of this affair, and believe me to be, your ever faithful friend and servant,

“J. JOHNSTONE.”

In the letter from Bedford, addressed to Mr. Pickard, respecting Walthamstow, already referred to, Mr. Belsham says,

“ And now I should like exceedingly well to return to my old habitation, and my old employments again, in peace. But this is at present forbidden. The letter you were so kind as to inclose in the frank, came from Dr. Johnstone, of Worcester. He informs me that an invitation is drawn up and signed by all the communicants and subscribers of that congregation, and that it will be sent immediately. If it comes to your house, I beg the favour of you to forward it hither. I shall hardly know what reply to make. There is in many respects a most agreeable prospect. The invitation unanimous. The hope of uniting a people in the utmost danger of division. They discover great zeal and attachment to me, by repeated applications, and by

advancing the salary. My principal objections arise from Mr. Warburton's being there, from the introduction of the Methodists, from its distance from my relations, and from the fewness of ministers in the neighbourhood. Indeed, I am much concerned on account of Mr. Robins. I am very sorry to distress him, and I mean to write to him soon again, though I wrote to him lately. I know that the interest of the Academy ought to be preferred to any private interest or inclination of my own."

As might be expected, these repeated applications to Mr. Belsham greatly alarmed Mr. Robins, and in a letter, addressed to Mr. Belsham at this time, he strongly expresses his apprehension that a connexion so pleasing and necessary to himself would soon be dissolved:

"I am greatly distressed," writes this worthy and amiable man, "by increasing fears. I never before, at least never but once, wished that you might not give universal satisfaction. But it is a vain wish, and therefore I will change it for one more kind and christian, that in every place and situation you may be very comfortable and useful. How happy should I think myself if that might yet be at Daventry! I saw Mr. Pickard to-day, who is very well. I hear of you in every company, but not to my satisfaction; but the will of God be done."

In accordance with his expressed intention, Mr. Belsham made a free and ample communication of his sentiments, and an unreserved statement of his situation to his friend and principal.

The Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM to the Rev.
THOMAS ROBINS.

“DEAR SIR,

“I write now, to fulfil the promise I lately made, to inform you of any important circumstance respecting myself. I write also on another account. Considering the relation in which we stand to each other, I think you have an undoubted right to know every step which I take, in which you and the Academy are concerned. I will therefore open my mind to you without reserve.

“The affair of Walthamstow has issued as I always thought and said it would. Mr. Pickard has probably informed you what I wrote to him. But it has not been followed by one consequence which I expected from it, the preventing an application from Worcester. Though I wrote to Dr. Johnstone, expressly to forbid it, before I left Daventry, I received yesterday a unanimous and most respectful letter from that society.

“If I remove from Daventry and settle in the country, I know of no place more promising than Worcester. I could mention many pleasing circumstances; the most important, the prospect of uniting a congregation, which, if I am rightly informed, is now upon the eve of division and destruction. My principal objection against it arises from my connexion with, and sincere regard for, you and the Academy. I have some other objections to the place itself, which are comparatively of little moment.

“Mr. Coward’s Trustees, who have an indis-

putable right to the direction of our Academy, have not thought fit to place this seminary upon the same footing as others of the same kind. They appoint a principal Tutor, and two Assistants. It is neither my business nor design to arraign the propriety of the plan. It has long succeeded well, and I doubt not that under your auspices it will still succeed, and that the Academy will long flourish. I have no reason to expect, nor any right to desire, that this plan should be infringed on my account. But one necessary consequence of this arrangement is, that the places of the Assistants are merely temporary. As such they always have been, and necessarily must be considered. Some obvious and unavoidable inconveniences attend it. One of the most evident, as well as the most common, is this ; that it seldom happens that when it is convenient to the Assistant to remove, it is convenient for the Academy that he should. I have been witness to repeated instances of this kind.

“ While I continue in the character of an Assistant, there is no person in the kingdom with whom I would sooner choose to live in that capacity than yourself. I hope you believe, Sir, that I feel the sincerest affection and regard for you ; and I now repeat, what I have frequently acknowledged with pleasure, that ever since you have lived at Daven-try, it has been very evident that both you and Mrs. Robins have made it your constant study to render my life happy, and my situation agreeable and respectable.

“ But as the office of Assistant cannot with propriety be regarded as a situation for life, I begin to

think it is now high time to look out for such a situation, and most of my friends are of the same opinion. Worcester is a place in which as many agreeable circumstances concur as can reasonably be expected any where. The only question is, whether I can with propriety leave Daventry now, or whether it be on any account necessary or right that I should continue there some time longer.

“It is easy to see that it would be a convenience to the Academy that I should continue two years longer at Daventry. A proper successor might then be easily found in our own family. But here a circumstance before mentioned arises, that it seldom happens to be equally convenient to both parties. If, however, it be clear that the business of the Academy cannot be conducted with reputation and advantage till that time, upon the supposition of my removal, I will relinquish Worcester, and say no more upon the subject. If I know my own motives, I mean nothing but what is fair, respectful, and right.

“When no proper person, either in the family or from some other academy, has been found to succeed an assistant on his removal, it has been usual to put the business of that Tutor into commission. Indeed, this experiment has never been tried but in the classical department, and *that*, Mr. Taylor* is unwilling to give up for mine. Nor do I condemn him. He knows his forte, and there are many reasons why it is best that he should continue where he is. It was, however, once proposed by Mr. Tayler, our trustee, to put the business of the other

* At that time the Classical Tutor.

assistant into commission. This was at Mr. Hill's removal, when I discovered a reluctance to undertake his department, after having been invited to be Tutor in the Classics.

“ If I leave Daventry, I think that the lectures of my department might possibly be carried on by commission. It is no great vanity to suppose that business would not be conducted to so much advantage ; but this inconvenience unavoidably arises, in a degree, at least, from the constitution of the Academy.

“ And now, Sir, I have expressed my mind to you fully and explicitly. I thought it my duty so to do. For my own part, I am greatly at a loss. I have not vanity enough to think myself of that great importance to the Academy, which your candour and humility are ready to represent ; nor have I any apprehension of making an irreparable breach, or doing any considerable hurt to the Academy, by my removal. But there may be an imaginary, or rather a relative importance, where there is not an intrinsic or real one. I am grieved when I think of distressing and discouraging you ; and could I suppose it possible that my removal from the Academy might injure your health or spirits in such a manner as to impair your comfort and usefulness, in any considerable or lasting degree, or that it would be followed by any lasting bad consequence to the institution, I would drop all thoughts of removing for the present, would send an immediate negative to Worcester, and cheerfully trust Providence for a future settlement. I am sure that I mean not to do any thing unjust, dishonourable, or

unfriendly ; and I am aware that the interest of the Academy is of much greater importance than any interest of my own, and even than that of the people of Worcester. I beg of you to communicate to me your thoughts upon the subject, in as free and unreserved a manner as I have communicated mine to you. I wish to know what effect you think my removal might have, either in respect to yourself or the Academy. From my present views, I should incline to go, but I cannot without your free consent. The people of Worcester have treated me with uncommon generosity, confidence, and respect ; but I have not yet given a word of encouragement. I wait till I hear from you. May the great Head of the church direct us both in the important affair before us ! Wherever Providence may cast my lot, my earnest wish and prayer will ever be for your prosperity and comfort. I shall ever retain a grateful sense of your affection and friendship, and shall rejoice in every opportunity of testifying the sincerity with which I subscribe myself, your sincere and affectionate friend and obliged servant,

“ T. BELSHAM.

“ *Bedford, July 5, 1777.*”

Mr. Robins received this letter whilst on a journey, and in reply, after apologizing for not returning an earlier answer, he observes, that he had met some of Mr. Coward's Trustees in London, and found them averse to any alteration in the plan of the institution. He then continues :

“As to your continuance at Daventry, they express the most earnest desire of it, and think it a matter

of the greatest importance to the credit and prosperity of the seminary that you should continue, at least till our family furnishes a proper successor. My own views of the matter are just the same as I have often expressed. It appears to me a thing of dreadful (I fear of fatal) consequence to have your office divided among the pupils, and these pupils not even seniors in the family. It might possibly have done when Dr. Ashworth, by his superior ability and long experience, was known to be capable of superintending the business of that department, and supplying the commissioners' lack of service. But for one so young in office and known inferiority of ability, to be obliged to have recourse to such an expedient, must injure the seminary in the highest degree. I certainly should never have undertaken the care of it, if I had had the least apprehension of being so soon deserted by a colleague on whose experience, ability, and character, I principally depended. I could indeed scarcely expect that you should fix for life in a situation even nominally inferior to mine; but I was encouraged to hope for your continuance a few years, which two years can scarcely be called. But I waive every argument of this kind. I should not, I do not, wish you to sacrifice even your inclinations, much less your interest, to mine. I most heartily thank you that you have continued with me so long, and shall ever acknowledge the benefit I have received from my connexion with you: and if you could think it your duty, and find it consistent with your inclinations, to continue one year longer, and much more two, I should think it one

of the greatest benefits Providence could bestow. I heartily pity the people at Worcester, and wish them just so supplied as you would supply them, yet I cannot but think the interest at large would suffer by your removal thither. Your situation at Daventry is at least as responsible as that at Worcester would be; for by whatever name you are called, you are in reality, and are reckoned by those who know the state of the Academy, not my assistant only, but my colleague; and there is no doubt that your deserved, your rising reputation, will secure you, whenever you choose to settle, a situation at least equal to that at Worcester. But though these are my deliberate sentiments, I must again observe, that I cannot expect you should sacrifice your own interest to mine; and assure you, that I do not wish you to deviate in the least from what you think the path of duty and comfort. I know in whose hands the hearts of all men are; and if he designs me success and comfort in my present department, I have no doubt which way yours will be inclined. If he means to humble me, and to frown upon my undertaking and the interest to which it is subservient, he is righteous, and his will be done. I shall wait with anxiety for your determination, and daily pray that you may have the best direction in forming it, and whatever it may be, shall still beg leave to consider you as one of the dearest and most valuable of my friends, and shall not cease devoutly to wish your continued, your increasing honour, usefulness, and comfort.”

Various circumstances tended to prevent Mr. Belsham from coming to any determination in this

important affair, at least to any that was favourable to the wishes of the society at Worcester. Some other letters passed between him and his friends, which would not now be very interesting, but the following extract from one to Dr. Johnstone, dated Oct. 5, will serve to explain the nature of his dilemma, the causes of delay, and his consequent resolution :

“ Were I now to sit down and form to myself an idea of a place in which I should choose to employ my labours, and to spend my days, the image which would rise in my mind would be just such a one as I have formed of Worcester ; and were it in my power to remove from my present situation, Worcester would be the object of my choice. I returned to Daventry last week, with an intention, little short of an absolute determination, to comply with your late respectful and generous invitation, even though I could not but know that the Academy must suffer some considerable inconvenience by my removal. But ‘ man proposes, and God disposes.’ Not only the absolute impossibility of providing a successor to me immediately, but the present precarious and very alarming state of Mr. Robins’s health, is an insuperable obstacle in my way. He labours under great weakness, and almost total loss of appetite and rest, a continual fever, and a cough, which no power of medicine has yet been able to mitigate. He is utterly incapable of any business at present, and is going to take a journey into Bedfordshire to try his native air. To leave him in these circumstances would be the excess of cruelty, and should evil consequences follow, I should never

forgive myself, nor should I be able to answer it at the bar of the public.—At present, therefore, I am confined to Daventry until Christmas; I may add, till Midsummer. A course of lectures once begun cannot, without great inconvenience, be dropped and taken up by another.”

In continuation, Mr. Belsham proposes to preach at Worcester three sabbath days in October; and advises the society to make application to the Rev. Samuel Palmer, of Hackney, as far better qualified for the place than himself;—but there was evidently sufficient reason to induce the society at Worcester to think that, in more favourable circumstances, of which they need not despair, Mr. Belsham might be prevailed on to accept their invitation. A further application was immediately resolved on, and a very unanimous and urgent invitation was sent to him to favour them with a visit for three sabbath days, as Mr. Belsham had proposed; in reply to which, though doubtful of the propriety of the plan, he says, “After all the uncommon respect and kindness which I have met with from my friends at Worcester, I cannot in honour or gratitude refuse the request.—According to my view of the matter, a different scheme would have been preferable, but it is pleasing to think, that an all-wise and good Providence superintends all, and will, I hope, bring this very important affair to a happy conclusion.

“Mr. Robins’ health has been restored much sooner and more perfectly than either he or any of his friends imagined. He is now (Oct. 2) as well as usual.”

The reader will not be surprised that this visit was followed by a unanimous request of the society, that Mr. Belsham would become their minister, or that the members of it were disposed to wait till his connexion with the Academy could be conveniently and honourably dissolved. If Mr. Robins had not been restored to his usual health and ability to discharge the duties of his office, it is certain that nothing could have induced Mr. Belsham to desert a post where his services and exertions were so urgently necessary. But by continuing at Daven-try till the ensuing Midsummer vacation, to complete the business of the session, Mr. Belsham thought himself at liberty to accept a situation to which he had been so repeatedly and earnestly invited, and in which he had the prospect of so much usefulness and happiness.

The following letter shews, that in this, as in other instances, Mr. Belsham had consulted his uncle, and that the plan and determination which he had formed were approved by him.

The Rev. EDWARD PICKARD to the Rev.
THOMAS BELSHAM.

“MY DEAR SIR,

“I am much obliged by the regard you express for my judgment and advice. I always suspect it myself, and therefore am very far from wishing that it should be decisive with you. What I can truly say is, that it proceeds from the sincerest friendship, and a concern for your usefulness and happiness.

I own, that when you informed me of your plan for Worcester, I was not quite clear in the pro-

priety of it ; but as it was fixed, I thought it would be very wrong to say any thing to unsettle you about it. I thought the consequence must be your settling at Worcester, and I was fearful lest the length of time* should be hurtful. As you state matters in your letter before me, I do not see how you can, or why you should, decline the invitation, or hesitate to accept it. It seems too far gone to retreat, unless you had reasons to give, which did not appear when you first encouraged it. But this is far from being the case. As you fairly state the case, the reasons for it, in my opinion, greatly preponderate. In the people you are satisfied, as far as you can be. That is very material. It is, indeed, the first consideration. Other things are rather circumstances, and we are not to expect every thing according to our wish. If the distance were not so great, it would doubtless be more agreeable to your friends, as well as to yourself.—You object to the whole charge of a congregation. You know there are not many places among us where it is otherwise. I recollect but two in London, Carter-lane, and Salters'-hall. I never knew co-pastorships do well. I could give many instances to the contrary, and would greatly prefer being alone, or being an assistant. And yet even this is subject to difficulties which a tender mind will very sensibly feel. I say not this with respect to myself, for I am happy in a connexion with a most worthy and amiable man, who deserves and hath my affection and esteem. A situation in London hath its temptations, but it is attended with peculiar diffi-

* Before Mr. B. could enter on his office.

culties and uncertainties. I look back and review my own, for nearly forty years, with a grateful wonder. But still I think, with a decent, comfortable provision, a situation in the country promises more satisfaction and usefulness, in the capacity of a minister. Your concern for Mr. Robins and the Academy is very kind and commendable; but that is not a new difficulty. You have in some measure obviated it, by consenting to stay so long. If you are to continue there till it is quite removed, you may stay a long while. When will those two things coincide, that you can leave Daventry without difficulty, and at the same time meet with a situation as promising as Worcester? And it is your deliberate judgment and design to fix with a congregation as a minister.—You see, my dear friend, with what freedom I write. It is faithful friendship that dictates. I could wish to have met you on the road for conversation, but that cannot be. I mean, as far as I can, to ease you of any embarrassment. But you will follow your own judgment. However you determine, it will not affect my esteem for you. If it be for Worcester, let me advise you to pay as much attention to them as you can, before you settle with them. I pray God to direct you in this very important affair. I now bid you heartily farewell.—I am your affectionate and faithful friend and servant,

“ E. PICKARD.

“ *London, Nov. 26, 1777.*”

The following is Mr. Belsham's reply to the society, accompanied by a letter to his friend Dr. J. Johnstone :

TO the TRUSTEES, SUBSCRIBERS, and MEMBERS of the
CONGREGATION of PROTESTANT DISSENTERS at
WORCESTER.

“ MY CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

“ I now return you my warmest acknowledgments for the unanimous and respectful invitations which you have given me, to take the pastoral charge of the Presbyterian congregation at Worcester, and for the peculiar marks of generosity, candour, and affection, with which these invitations have been accompanied.

“ I have thought upon the important subject with all the attention of which I am capable; I have consulted my wisest friends, and have repeatedly implored the direction and influence of unerring Wisdom. I have at length determined, God willing, to accept your affectionate call, and to fix my residence among you as a stated minister.

“ Such is the nature of my present connexion and engagements, that I cannot quit them till Midsummer without material detriment to the seminary to which I am related. You have kindly obviated this difficulty by the willingness you express to wait till I am at liberty. I thank you for this expression of your regard. I mean, if Providence permit, to fix with you in June or July, and to pay you a visit or two in the mean time. I hope that my delay will be attended with no material injury to the congregation.

“ I now consider myself as standing in the important relation of minister to the congregation at

Worcester. My principal object in quitting an agreeable retirement, endeared by so many pleasing and useful connexions, and in undertaking the charge of a Christian society, is your spiritual improvement. To be made instrumental in promoting your everlasting interest I shall ever esteem the highest honour and happiness of my life. To accomplish it I shall cheerfully spend my strength and exert my utmost ability. Let me beg your concurrence and your prayers. You may ever depend on my most affectionate and devout remembrance of you at the throne of grace. Give me the same token of your Christian friendship and concern for the success of my ministerial labours. And while, in dependence on superior strength and wisdom, I am endeavouring to discharge the important duties of the ministerial character with fidelity and attention, I doubt not I shall meet with the same candour and affection which my excellent predecessor experienced, and for which the congregation at Worcester has been so long distinguished.

“ May the blessing of the great Head of the church and the Master of assemblies descend upon the connexion now formed between us, and render it subservient to his own glory, to our mutual edification and comfort, and to the advancement of his spiritual kingdom. With the greatest sincerity and respect I am, my Christian friends, your affectionate brother and servant in Christ,

“ T. BELSHAM.”

The Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM to Dr. JAMES
JOHNSTONE.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“At length the die is cast, and the important determination formed, which introduces me into a new character for life, and gives, as it were, a new complexion to my existence. I hope my friends will not condemn me for deferring my determination so long. I think it cannot be any material inconvenience to them. The importance of the consequences kept me long in suspense, and certain unforeseen circumstances turned up since my return from Worcester, which involved me in new difficulties, and almost necessarily prolonged my painful indecision.

“I thank the Trustees for the obliging manner in which they have settled the overplus of the subscription. I do not think that it is a matter of much consequence; but it is right that every thing of this kind should be settled at first. I have seen many instances of the ill consequences arising from the want of it. If I know myself, we shall never have any difference upon this head. The manner in which this affair has been settled is an additional instance of generosity and respect.

“I feel a painful anxiety in entering upon a critical and important charge, with which I am in a great measure unacquainted, and in which I shall greatly need the candour and indulgence of my friends; but I am happy in the consciousness of a sincere endeavour to discover the line of duty, of the integrity of my motives, and the honesty of my

intentions; and I rely with thankfulness on the affection of my people, and on the promises and providence of an almighty Friend.

“If you could have read my heart for this last fortnight, I am sure you would have thought me a great object of pity. I hope, now that the matter is determined, my mind will be more easy. I think that I have followed the leadings of Providence and of duty; yet one knows not how to part without a painful emotion from long and pleasing connexions; yet I place the best hopes in the humanity and partiality of my new friends, and particularly form the most pleasing expectations from the prospect of renewing my former intimacy with yourself.* May we long be assistant to each other in the paths of science and of virtue. I am, my dear friend,

“Most affectionately yours,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.

“*Daventry, Dec. 5, 1777.*”

As soon as Mr. Belsham had formed his resolution, he made his friends at Bedford acquainted with his determination, and endeavoured to prevail upon his mother to make Worcester the place of her future residence. The thought of a more distant separation from a parent he so highly esteemed, and to whom he was so affectionately attached, was painful to his feelings, and he naturally wished to be relieved from it; but it is not to be supposed, that his own gratification was the only motive

* Dr. James Johnstone had been a student at Daventry, though Mr. Belsham's junior by a year. See the *Monthly Repository* for the year 1822, p. 196.

which suggested the proposal : he might imagine, that the change of scene would be beneficial to her health, and as the rest of the family would continue to live at Bedford, her occasional visits there, or even her return thither, if she did not find Worcester agreeable and advantageous, would be at all times practicable. She declined the experiment on very sufficient grounds, and her letter upon the occasion is a further specimen of her piety and benevolent affection :

Mrs. BELSHAM to the Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ MY DEAR SON,

“ And so you tell me the die is cast, and turned up for Worcester. I hope you have been under the direction of a wise and kind Providence, and pray that you may be a great and lasting blessing to that place. I pity Daventry, and, with Miss Ashworth, could not forbear shedding some tears on that account. I had a letter, yesterday, from Mr. Pickard. That worthy man tells me he advised you very strongly to accept the invitation, and thinks you have a great prospect of comfort and usefulness. I thank you for your proposal with regard to me, and am so well convinced of your kindness and affection for me in it, that I hope while I have any recollection I shall remember it with gratitude. But I am too far advanced in life, and encompassed with too many infirmities, to make new connexions, or change my place of abode to a part of England so far from my native place. I am just entering my grand climacteric, a year fatal to many ; perhaps it may be so to me ; may

I be fit for that great change, and that hour, appointed to all the living ! I shall be very glad to hear from you while at Worcester, and hope you will at least spend an evening or two with us soon. Our united loves attend you.—I am ever your affectionate mother,

“ A. BELSHAM.

“ *Dec. 18, 1777.*”

In the beginning of the year 1778, Mr. Belsham had to regret the loss of his highly esteemed friend and relative, the Rev. Edward Pickard. The following account of his illness and death, from the pen of Joseph Paice, Esq., one of Mr. Coward's Trustees, and an intimate friend of Mr. Pickard, shews the kind and benevolent disposition of that worthy and amiable man :

JOSEPH PAICE, Esq., to the Rev. THOMAS
ROBINS, Daventry.

(Or, in his absence, to be opened by Mrs. Robins.)

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I must be the messenger to you of an apprehended event, which your tenderness and regard for Mr. Belsham will determine you to keep reserved, and only beg you to prepare him for that afflictive providence to his friends, the church, and the world, which the translation of Mr. Pickard must be felt to be by every survivor. He is yet living, but it will be a wonder of mercy to the prayers of his many sympathising friends, should he be restored. His distemper is a most rapid fever, both of the nervous and the putrid kind. He is convulsed and insensible, attended with a symptom which is gene-

rally the last, hiccough. On Tuesday last he came with Mrs. Pickard (his sister) to dinner, at this house, to meet Mr. Farmer and Mr. Tayler. Mr. and Mrs. Pickard came and returned in a coach. When he entered the house his lips were pale and faltering, and he shook so with an aguish coldness, that for some little time he was unable to speak. He soon summoned up so much superiority to his own sufferings, that he became cheerfully conversible. But at dinner he could eat nothing, and returned home within an hour after. The next morning he arose at his usual time, and thought himself better. On Thursday he took to his bed, but in the evening seemed to become easier, and conversed a good deal with some vigour. On Friday he suffered much in his head and breast, which we flattered ourselves was the gout. Mr. Collier attended him as an apothecary, and on Saturday recommended that a physician should be called in. Dr. Hinckley was approved and attended him ; but yesterday morning the symptoms were so discouraging, that he prepared the family to think the worst. All that Mr. Collier had done, Dr. Hinckley approved. This most dangerous distemper is of such a nature, so plain and familiar to every skilful practitioner in medicine, that there are not two methods of treating it. A consultation of twenty could not encourage us to expect more than from the skill and experience of that very respectable physician, Dr. Hinckley. I believe the fatal arrow was discharged about fourteen days ago, though our excellent friend did not feel himself sensibly wounded till Tuesday last. Mr. Collier,

the apothecary, justifies this apprehension by observing, that from the appearance of his tongue when he first visited him, he must have been ill a fortnight. The sight of a second physician, if the patient should have any interval of recollection, would distress him exceedingly, and disturb the tranquillity of his last moments ; more particularly so, as the only senior physician who has been thought of by his friends, Dr. Fothergill, he has constantly disapproved in his hours of health and most deliberate judgment.

“ You shall hear from me again to-morrow night. I would have deferred writing till then, but for fear lest the distressing news should get down to Daven-try by some other hand, and too abruptly reach the ears of Mr. Belsham. Ere to-morrow night there will either be hope, or our excellent friend will be unspeakably happy. My best and most affectionate regards attend Mr. Belsham. Dear Sir, ever respectfully yours,

“ JOSEPH PAICE.”

The following night brought the intelligence that Mr. Pickard died at four o'clock on Tuesday morning, Feb. 10th.

Mr. Belsham's own feelings and sentiments on this affecting occasion, are fully expressed in the following letter of condolence to the son of his lamented friend, and shew, that in the midst of his own regret and sorrow for a loss which no one would more deeply feel, he was not unmindful of the distress of others, nor insensible of the weight of that affliction which he shared with them :

The Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM to Mr. PICKARD,
Fenchurch Street, London.

“DEAR SIR,

“Most sincerely do I sympathise with you and Mrs. Pickard, and many more, in our great and common affliction, from the awful and unexpected removal of one of the best and most respectable of men. The loss to the public is great. We have but few such men to lose, and the few we have can ill be spared, in an age of growing folly and dissipation. The loss to the Dissenting interest is particularly great;—to his congregation, I fear, irreparable. O may he live in their tempers and in their lives, as I doubt not he will long survive in their memories and in their hearts! But they are his friends, those who were most intimately conversant with him, who knew him best, and who were honoured with the greatest share of his company, of his affection, and of his wise, benevolent, and improving conversation; these are they who best knew his worth, who loved him most, and who will be most sensible of his loss. I most sensibly sympathise with you and Mrs. Pickard, and with Mrs. E. Pickard, and I most sincerely wish you all, what I doubt not you do already experience, a large share of those divine consolations which alone can administer relief under such a heavy affliction, and compose the mind to humble resignation. As for myself, I consider my own loss as in many respects peculiar and irreparable. He was a friend to whom I could apply with the utmost con-

fidence ; whose wisdom, experience, affection, and knowledge of the world were always ready to assist me. I have not such another friend to lose. But when the great Master of the household sees proper to call home his faithful servants to receive the reward of their labours, it is our duty to submit, not to repine. It is his province to dispose, ours to acquiesce ;—to be thankful that such important blessings have been so long continued, not to murmur that they are spared to us no longer. His great Master required his services in a more exalted and extensive sphere. Shall we repine because we are momentary losers by this dispensation ? Or shall we not rather imitate the spirit and the character of our ascended friend, that we may shortly participate in his reward, and meet him in that world, where friends shall never part ?

“I am concerned to hear that the rapidity and violence of my uncle’s disorder were such as to prevent him from bearing his dying testimony to the truth, and excellence, and divine consolation of that holy religion which he loved, and preached, and lived. The last words of our departing friends make a tender and lasting impression on the minds of survivors. But He, in whose sight the death of his saints is precious, orders every circumstance of that important event in that manner which shall be most subservient to the purposes of his unchangeable wisdom and grace.

“I am very much obliged to Mr. Paice for his civility in writing to Mr. Robins, and shall ever recollect with gratitude his tender sympathy. May

I beg the favour of you to present my most respectful compliments to him, and likewise to your lady, and to Mrs. E. Pickard, &c.?

“I am, dear Sir, your ever affectionate friend and humble servant,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.

“*Daventry, Feb. 26, 1778.*”

Mr. Belsham settled at Worcester in July 1778; but in the mean time he made his friends a visit about the beginning of April, and virtually entered upon his pastoral office. The sermon which he preached on the 5th of that month, was evidently composed for the occasion, from Rom. xv. 29: “And I am sure that when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ.” It is a plain but able statement of the character and views of the Christian minister, and concludes with expressing a modest and humble, but sincere desire, that he might come to the people who had called him to the charge, “in the fulness of the blessing of Christ,” and so fulfil his ministry, as to justify the language in which he had addressed them, and an assurance that on their part they would attend upon his ministry with proper motives, with a disposition to receive instruction, with a proper sense of the value of the Gospel, with the love of Christ, with a candid temper, and above all, with their united and earnest prayer to God for his encouragement, comfort, and success.

In describing the fulness of the blessings of the Gospel, Mr. Belsham had enlarged, as might be

expected from the sentiments which he entertained, upon the character of Christ, as the only-begotten Son of God, and the express image of his person ; and spoke of the Apostle as being fully instructed in the sublime MYSTERIES of the Gospel, which he stated to be the knowledge of the love of God in Christ Jesus,—of the great end for which he became incarnate,—of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the share which that important agent takes in the businesss of salvation. His own observations upon this sermon, dated March 15, 1814, must not be omitted :

“ This sermon is a curious document, as representing the state of mind with which the writer entered upon his office at Worcester, and his full and practical belief of the truth of those doctrines which now appear the principal corruptions of the Christian religion, and from the delusion of which it is wonderful that he should ever have been released ; τυφλὸς ὧν ἄρτι βλέπω.”

Almost immediately after Mr. Belsham's settlement with his congregation, arrangements were made for his ordination to the pastoral office ; an initiatory service which, at that time, was considered almost as an indispensable qualification for the right discharge of the duties of a minister ; and without which a young minister was supposed to be unfitted for the administration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Mr. Belsham was superior to such narrow views, however he might approve of the ceremony itself, and on the Sunday previous to the day fixed for his or-

dination, he took occasion to explain to his people the scriptural meaning of the term, the nature of the service, and the manner in which it was performed, shewing, that in the case specified, Acts xiii. 23, it was a distinct ordinance from that which is used in Christian churches, in times subsequent to the age of the apostles, and that there is no appointment of such an ordinance in Scripture, though it may be thought expedient, and though it has been the practice of Christians, to adopt a ceremony of this description, which, he observes, may be done with due care to avoid the imposition of it, and of any peculiar mode of performing it, and with the acknowledgment, that it is not essential to the discharge of the ministerial office. In this discourse Mr. Belsham admits, that a service of that simple nature which he describes, and for the purpose which he specifies, ought to be repeated whenever a minister removes from one situation to another; and in his own case this was done, on his return to Daventry, when, on assuming the charge of the Academy, he was chosen minister of the congregation. If this practice were generally adopted, it would greatly tend to prevent any improper or superstitious notions of the nature and efficacy of ordination, as it is now administered among the Dissenters.

The following letter, written on this occasion will be acceptable to the reader, as it is from the pen of one whose name and reputation extended far beyond the sphere of the denomination to which the writer belonged.

The Rev. JOB ORTON to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“DEAR SIR,

“I have just had the pleasure of hearing from Mr. Fawcett of the very numerous and respectable assembly which you had at Worcester yesterday ; especially that you had so many of your brethren, and that the services of the day were conducted in so honourable, agreeable, and edifying a manner. All this is confirmed to me by Mrs. Laughner, whom I have likewise seen. I endeavoured in my weak and languid way, although absent in body, to be present in spirit, and join with the assembly in the prayers and praises of the day. I hope and believe, that a divine blessing will attend your labours and services, and that you will be an instrument of much good in your new station. I fear, few of us retain so deep and habitual a sense as we should, of the engagements which our profession, and especially our ordination, lays us under to serve God with our spirits in the gospel of his Son. At the time, perhaps, our hearts glow with zeal, and we spring forward with ardour to perform the duties of our office ; but, if I may judge of others by myself, our love and our zeal are apt to grow cold, and we have need of much pains to keep them warm and active. Perhaps also we are too sanguine in our expectations from our labours, and from our people, —that the one will be every way acceptable and useful, and the other very grateful, attentive, and obedient. It is good to keep our expectations from ourselves, and from men, very low ; while we may

rejoice and encourage ourselves in the grace, the tenderness, and the faithfulness of our great Master. But I am ashamed to write thus to a minister of your wisdom, experience, and standing; yet while we are in this militant state, and in an age so lukewarm and trifling, we need every incentive to keep up our spirits, courage, and zeal. May God assist and inspire you in every part of your ministerial work, and give you an increasing comfort in the temper and behaviour of those among whom you labour! I beg your continued prayers for a worn-out minister. May you increase while I am decreasing, and long shine as a light in the world, and turn many to righteousness!—I am, dear Sir, your affectionate and faithful friend and humble servant,

“JOB ORTON.

“October 9, 1778.”

On Mr. Belsham's leaving Daventry, Mr. Coward's Trustees made him a handsome present of plate, as an acknowledgment of his important services. The following expression of their respect and esteem is extracted from Mr. Paice's official letter to Mr. Belsham, dated Nov. 16th, 1778:

“It is given me in charge, Sir, by my brethren of Mr. Coward's trust, to assure you of our unanimous and grateful sense of your merits, in the relation in which we had lately the happiness to be more particularly connected with you; a relation, to the dissolution of which no consideration could have reconciled us, but the probability that the exchange you have made will prove a permanent foundation of your happiness, and the extension of it.”

This Mr. Belsham acknowledges in the following letter :

TO JOSEPH PAICE, Esq.

“SIR,

“I feel myself under great obligations to the gentlemen of Mr. Coward’s trust for the late flattering testimony of their regard to me, and their satisfaction in my services at Daventry. The only merit I can claim, is that of having honestly endeavoured to discharge the important trust reposed in me to the utmost of my ability. If in any instance those endeavours have not proved fruitless, or have met with the approbation of the wise and good, they have been amply rewarded.

“The interests of that important seminary, with which I have had so long and such an endearing connexion, as well as those of its patrons and tutors, will ever lie near my heart. My most affectionate wishes and prayers will ever be offered for their prosperity and success ; and happy shall I be in embracing every opportunity that may occur, of shewing my zeal for so useful an institution. In this view, I cannot but congratulate the friends of the Academy, that the gentleman who is appointed to succeed to the department I lately occupied in it, (the Rev. Timothy Kenrick,) is as eminent for the strength of his understanding as for the rectitude and goodness of his heart.

“The very precarious state of Mr. Robins’s health is a very alarming circumstance to all who have the pleasure of his acquaintance, who are solicitous for the honour of the Academy, or who are

concerned for the interests of religion and charity among the Dissenters at large.

“ It gives me pleasure to hear that Mr. Farmer’s health is so much mended. May He, who is alone the physician of value, add efficacy to every means that may be used for his complete recovery, that a luminary of such distinguished brightness may be restored to the prayers of the church, and may long continue to shine in it with undiminished lustre.

“ I am much obliged to Mr. Tayler for the kind and particularly seasonable and acceptable assistance that he gave at my ordination ; and I beg the favour of you, Sir, to return him the hearty thanks of myself and all my friends.

“ That your extensive benevolence, and that tender sympathy of which I have had such striking proofs as I can never forget, may be crowned with that conscious, unspeakable satisfaction and peace which virtue and piety alone can inspire, is the fervent wish and prayer of, dear Sir, your most obedient and obliged, humble servant,

“ T. BELSHAM.

“ *Worcester, Nov.. 26, 1778.*”

It might be expected that the new and interesting situation in which Mr. Belsham was placed would call forth the expression of his mother’s affection, and of the pleasure which she derived from the report of his acceptance, usefulness, and success.

Mrs. BELSHAM to the Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ MY DEAR SON,

“ Your letters are always very acceptable, but your last was peculiarly so, as it was so long since

I heard before, that we began to suspect your new friends had a little jostled out your old ones. It was more than a month since we had the last tidings of you ; and pray remember your own sentiment, 'that the further we are distant, the more we long to hear of each other, and the more interesting every incident is to us.'

"I much rejoice in your health and happiness ; and if the latter is founded on your people's real esteem for you, and your usefulness to them, it promises to be lasting. May God Almighty continue both, and grant that in the great day it may appear you have had many seals to your ministry! Ministers do not always know the extent of their own usefulness, therefore should not be discouraged ; and if they have reason to believe themselves sincerely desirous to do good, should conclude they are so, though they cannot point out the peculiar instances so clearly as they could wish. I have frequently heard, and lately, how useful your preaching has been amongst us, and I hope many will have cause to bless God for hearing you, who can never tell you of it on this side the grave.

"Mr. Symonds had lately a letter from Mr. Jenkins, in which he expresses high satisfaction with your ordination, and exceedingly approved of your Confession of Faith, and the evangelical temper and spirit you shewed at that time, and, indeed, said very handsome things on the subject.

"—I am much pleased with the present you received from the Trustees, which in itself is very handsome ; but the value is doubled in the motives which occasioned it. May you long enjoy the

satisfaction arising from this expression of their respect and esteem!

“Death has in a very awful manner been keeping his court at Bedford. We have had a very alarming disorder among us; fever, sore throat, sickness, and rash, which carried off some in a few days.”— (After mentioning some affecting instances of the fatal effects of this disorder, particularly in one family, Mrs. Belsham continues.) “Such a scene of distress I have hardly ever seen; every one seemed interested in their calamity, and that hospitable house, which was always open to their friends, is now almost a desolate mansion. The recollection affects me so much, that I can hardly guide my pen. I hope a stop is put to this direful disease, as for some weeks no fresh instances have occurred. But I must inform you of the death of one of your acquaintance. Old Mr. Palmer, who has been gradually declining for many months, last week bid adieu to this world and all its cares and imperfections.— If I tell you, after writing this long letter, that I am very indifferent, and my spirits bad, you will hardly believe it; but it is so. My heart has so strongly felt for my friends, that my spirits, perhaps my health, has been hurt by it. May every trouble wean us more from these transitory scenes, and lead us to fix our hearts more steadfastly on that world where joys are sincere and substantial! Adieu. Your ever affectionate mother,

“A. BELSHAM.

“*Bedford, Nov. 30, 1778.*”

Mr. Belsham was scarcely fixed in his situation

at Worcester before he received an invitation to remove to Ware. The application was made (Nov. 20) through his former tutor, Mr. French, who acknowledges, that it was owing to him that it had been so long delayed, and because "he thought Mr. Belsham's continuance at Daventry wore so promising an aspect on the prosperity of the Dissenting interests in general, that he could not be prevailed on to call him thence." Mr. Godwin, the author of *Political Justice*, had declined an invitation to settle with the society at Ware; and Mr. French was affectionately urgent with Mr. Belsham to listen to the invitation, "if it could be done with propriety and consistency of character, for from these," he adds, "whatever may await us, I wish you in no instance through the whole of life to depart." The reader will easily believe, that Mr. Belsham felt himself obliged to return an unfavourable answer. After acknowledging the kindness of his friends, he says, "The same reasons which first induced me to come to Worcester continue still—the present unanimity of my people, the attachment of my friends, the expenses they have been at on my account, my late ordination and settlement among them, the danger of division in case of my removal, and the prospect of being as useful here as I have reason to expect in any other place,—these are ties which as yet bind me to my present situation, and permit me not to indulge one thought of a change."

In consequence of the death of his uncle Pickard, Mr. Belsham received an invitation in the following spring from the society at Carter-lane, to join Mr. Tayler, their minister, which, however, he declined,

for the reasons which are stated in the following letter :

The Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM to the Rev.
THOMAS TAYLER.

“ REV. AND DEAR SIR,

“ I am sorry to find by a letter I have just received from Mr. William Smith, that you have been disappointed in not hearing from me. I intended writing before this, but really the importance and delicacy of the subject made me afraid; and I understood from the conversation which I had with Mr. Warren, the evening before I left town, that the delay of a few days would be no material inconvenience.

“ But I might as well have written sooner. The perplexity of my mind has not been lessened by procrastination, and I still feel myself fluctuating amidst various and contrary motives. Were I now in the circumstances in which I found myself twelve months ago, I know no situation which would have tempted me like that of being connected with you, in so respectable a society as that at Carter-lane. So far as I can judge from circumstances, it would have completely answered every wish and hope that I had formed for usefulness and comfort. Providence has now fixed me at Worcester. Such has been the behaviour of my friends here, and such is the prospect of usefulness and happiness before me, that I do not feel myself at liberty to remove, unless some very important object were to be obtained by it. I do not discern that object in my removal to Carter-lane; which, though confessedly by far the

more important society, does not need my service to keep it in a united and flourishing state. I cannot therefore but think it my duty to continue for the present where I am; and I am confirmed in this opinion by the almost unanimous advice of those of my friends whom I have consulted upon this head.

“ I thank you, Sir, for your very favourable partiality to me. Had Providence permitted, I could not have wished a more favourable connexion. I am obliged to your friends for their candid attention to my labours, and for the honour they do me in directing their thoughts to me. I affectionately commend both you and them to the Divine blessing, hoping that Providence will soon direct to some faithful and judicious minister, who, inheriting much of the spirit of our departed friend, shall long prove, in a connexion greatly and equally pleasing to you and them, the instrument of supporting and preserving the best interests of that respectable society.—I remain, dear Sir, your affectionate and obliged friend and servant,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.”

This proposal was immediately followed by one from his friend Mr. Edward Pickard, urging him to allow his name to be mentioned to the society at Walthamstow, which was again without a minister. Many circumstances were strongly stated to induce Mr. Belsham to assent to the wishes of his friends. The prospect of usefulness was extensive, and the income would have greatly exceeded that which he received at Worcester; but the latter was a second-

ary consideration with Mr. Belsham, and, without a strong assurance of the former, he felt no inclination to quit a situation which he had so lately accepted. In his reply to Mr. Pickard, dated May 12th, Mr. Belsham observes, "The happiness of my present situation, the cordial unanimity of my people, and the fresh proofs of affection and respect I am daily receiving from them, render it equally imprudent and ungenerous in me to desert them so soon after my settlement among them, without some reasons more obvious and cogent than I can at present apprehend in respect to Walthamstow.

"Upon the whole, I am clearly of opinion, that it will be best for the society to turn their attention to some other person, who may have it more in his power, though none can have it more in his heart and will, to serve and unite them than I have. That the Supreme Governor of the church may guide their choice to such a one, is my affectionate and earnest prayer."

From the subsequent extract of a letter to his friend and successor at Daventry, the Rev. Timothy Kenrick, it will appear what were the favourite subjects of Mr. Belsham's studies, and how much he was interested in the important question of Philosophical Necessity, which had been brought into discussion and ably defended by Dr. Priestley, its unshrinking and undaunted advocate.

"You write to me, my good friend, as if I were a confirmed necessarian. I confess myself as yet an inquirer into the subject, and I acknowledge there are many difficulties, which I do not well know how to solve: those which you mention are

undoubtedly the principal.—But the question is, are not the difficulties equal on the side of liberty, or even superior? We must be content to choose the side where the difficulties are least, and to palliate them as well as we can.—The sensation of remorse is undoubtedly highly useful; but it is to be remembered that only one ingredient of that sensation is removed by Necessity, and perhaps that is not of so much consequence as is generally supposed.—Is it necessary, in order to our using means for the cure of a fever, that we should blame ourselves for having, by our own imprudence, brought the disease upon us? It is the pain of the disease, not that of self-condemnation, which leads us, in this case, to seek a remedy.—The thought seems to me applicable to the disorders of the mind. Misery is as necessarily entailed upon moral as upon natural disorders, and for the same reason, viz. to influence us to seek after and embrace the proper methods of cure.

“ I much approve of your intention to draw up a few lectures on the new discoveries upon air. They must be entertaining and instructive. I should be very glad to be one of your pupils upon that subject, which is certainly a very entertaining branch of natural philosophy. How I envy you the business of the ensuing year! Philosophy and Metaphysics are my favourite topics. I cannot yet bring my mind to relish Divinity as I would and ought.”

From the following expression in a letter of Mrs. Belsham to her son, it seems, that the subject of philosophical necessity had been discussed in the

family circle, or had been referred to in their correspondence, though without obtaining a favourable reception. It might indeed have been expected, that one argument by which it is supported would have had some weight with those who admitted the Calvinistic doctrine of election, or any modification of it. The prescience of God has always been considered by the advocates of this tenet as the ground of certainty that all events were unalterably fixed, and the condition of every individual unchangeably determined, and therefore the transition to the doctrine of Necessity might appear easy and natural. Nor is it improbable that such was the conviction of Mr. Belsham's mind. It is amusing to observe how playfully Mrs. Belsham alludes to her son's predilection for this unpopular doctrine.

“Indeed, my dear Sir, I neither like Dr. Priestley nor his opinions, and believe you had a free will to write sooner to Bedford, and should have exerted it, as your negligence gave us some uneasiness, and your brother was obliged to write another letter to Mr. Whitbread, on that account.”

The portion of Mr. Belsham's diary which relates to this period, and which will be interesting to the reader, is the following :

“Monday, Jan. 4, 1779.—In conformity to the advice I gave my people yesterday from these words, Jer. l. 5, ‘Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten,’ I set apart this morning for a serious recollection of the past year, and a solemn renewed dedication of myself to God, through Jesus Christ.

“I began with asking the Divine blessing.—I

then read a few chapters, and recollected the events, mercies, afflictions, deaths, and sins of the past year. I acknowledged, confessed, and gave thanks upon my knees. I then considered the present state of my mind, my hopes and fears, resolutions and prospects.—I spread my case before God, implored his mercy, and with fear, though at the same time, I hope, with sincerity and cheerfulness, was enabled to renew my covenant engagement with God in a more serious and solemn manner than I have done for some years past, though not in the usual form. I concluded with the 116th Psalm, and found my mind in an easy, cheerful frame,—thankful to God, who had disposed and enabled me to go through this religious exercise; the savour of which will, I hope, long abide upon my mind.—A gleam of hope sprung up through the gloom of darkness that had so long hovered over my mind; and I almost begin to think that I shall be able to call him my God and Father, in a Redeemer.”

“ Lord’s-day evening, Oct. 3rd.—Sacrament day. I set apart two hours for reflection, meditation, and prayer. I was very little affected in the administration of the Lord’s Supper this morning, and through the whole of the public services of the day have been straitened and uncomfortable. But my devotions this evening have been serious and lively. I began with a short prayer. I then read the last three chapters of Luke. I meditated upon my sins and follies, confessed them in the presence of God; sung the 51st Psalm; and after meditation prayed an intercessory prayer, and concluded with singing a hymn. I was copious and serious in confession—

loss of time, irregularity in devotion—and this sat heavy upon my mind. I was very thankful for restraining grace, and earnest in begging forgiveness, and grace to guard against sin for the future. In the intercessory prayer I enlarged upon the circumstances of my congregation, and prayed over the several classes, besides my friends, correspondents, family, the world, and the church.

“I hope the devotional exercises of the day have been useful, and that a serious impression will long abide upon my mind. I have great doubts of my own sincerity, and fears about the safety of my state. I hope that the discipline of Divine Providence will change and sanctify my heart. This was the object of my earnest prayer,—and I was thankful that I thought I could see some little glimpse of recovery, and a dawn of hope;—yet it is but a dawn, and I am much afraid lest upon a return of temptation I should fall into the snare, and that my goodness should vanish as the morning cloud.”

“Lord’s-day evening, Nov. 7.—I cannot lie down to rest without acknowledging the particular goodness of God this day. Indeed, the whole week past, I have been in a frame of mind more than usually serious and devout. I have had some devotional exercises in private that have been very pleasant and refreshing; but to-day I think I have not felt such a lively and affecting sense of divine things since I first gave myself up to God in public. My morning subject was, Rev. iii. 20: ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock.’ I was much affected both in the prayer and in the sermon, and

much more so at the administration of the Lord's Supper. Indeed, I could scarcely go on for weeping, and my heart was much enlarged; especially under a sense of the greatness of my guilt, and with some humble hope of mercy. O let it not prove a vain hope! I had not much time this evening for religious exercises after communion. But my prayer, though short, was serious, and I hope acceptable. O, it is a good thing to draw near to God,—these are seasons peculiarly refreshing. Several of my congregation thanked me particularly for my sermon. It seems to have made an impression. I wish it may be lasting. O, to be the instrument of saving one soul from death—of opening one heart for the admission of Christ and his salvation! And oh, let not my own heart be shut against this heavenly guest; lest, after having faithfully admonished others, I should myself be cast away."

The following extracts are from some of the last letters which Mr. Belsham received from his mother. The reader must have perceived that she had a mind endowed with no common talents, and that her piety and benevolence diffused a lustre over her whole character, which attracted those who were connected with her in the relations of social life. In her family, in particular, her example must have had a commanding influence; and by those who shared in her affection and friendship, her opinions and advice must have been received with respect and deference. It is evident how much the mind of the subject of this Memoir was early impressed with those religious sentiments of practical importance which pervade the letters of this excellent

lady, and which manifest the value and efficacy of that instruction and guidance which are imparted by a judicious and affectionate mother, whose own mind is well cultivated and disciplined, and whose great concern is to see her children “walking in the truth ;” acting upon those principles and views which will render them useful members of society, and an ornament to the religion they profess :

“ *Bedford, Sept. 26, 1779.*

“I flatter myself that my dear son will be pleased to see a few lines from me, as it will be some proof that I am better than when he left Bedford. Indeed, I thank God I am so, and was able to attend the public worship of God, last Lord’s-day, without any considerable inconvenience ; but I am still far from well, nor do I ever expect to be so ; but whatever may be my situation, I desire to acknowledge the wisdom and goodness of God in all his ways to me, and resign myself entirely to his will. I would not wish to live till my friends are weary of me, or to be a blank in creation. I have endeavoured to be useful, and my friends have thought me so ; but is not that time over—will it not soon be forgot ?”

“ *January 11, 1780.*

“Now to speak a little of my health—the severity of the weather is almost more than I can bear ; but with regard to my dropsical complaint it is amazingly better, though at present I do not abound in strength or flesh, but as I can both eat and sleep well, perhaps I may have some addition

to both. I do not wish to live a useless life ; perhaps I may be thought to do so now ; but God's time is the best time, and I desire always to see the wisdom and goodness of his proceedings."

" February, 6, 1780.

" Here I am by my parlour fire writing to you, while my whole family are gone to public worship to join the many thousands who, I hope, are with the greatest sincerity humbling themselves before God, on account of their own sins and the sins of the nation, and praying that the Divine judgments may not fall on us, which we have deserved, in so great a degree as to be our ruin. I think it cannot be difficult to express ourselves in such terms that all sincere Christians may heartily concur in, and may God give his blessing to us as a nation, and as individuals. I wished much to be there, but my infirm state of health and the severity of the weather have confined me to my house for several weeks past."

" July 26, 1780.

" I suppose you begin to think it high time to hear from Bedford. We have been in a bustle ever since you went, with company coming and going. My head is often giddy, and my spirits very much fatigued ; but it must be so. I have twice had the pleasure of Mr. Robins' company. I think he was not quite so well the last time. He had got a little cold. He talked of going to Buxton. I hope a kind Providence will point out some way of recovery, that that excellent man may long be con-

tinued an ornament to that station he has so well filled, and in which he is so much beloved.

“Mr. Howard is at last got to Cardington, but with a heart and head full of jail schemes and penitential houses. Have you seen the poem addressed to him by a Mr. Hayley? We admire it much; but Mr. Howard says he is quite confounded, though he has invited him and his lady to spend a few days at Cardington. Mr. Hayley is a Sussex gentleman of fortune. I think Mr. Howard strangely neglects his son. He has been with him but one fortnight this vacation, which, I believe, satisfies the young gentleman. He is now at Theobalds, where he has an opportunity of seeing much company. He is really a fine youth.

“I heard yesterday from Palgrave. Betsy is supremely happy in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Barbauld, who have for their visitor the charming Dr. Enfield, and are in expectation of the Bishop of Cork, who is at Norwich. How will Bedford appear after such enjoyments?”

The close of the year terminated the sufferings and the life of this pious and amiable lady. This event is noticed by Mr. Belsham in his diary as follows:

“Sunday evening, Dec. 24th.—Yesterday I received the melancholy news of my dear mother’s death, who expired on Friday, about twelve o’clock. I composed a sermon afterwards, preached three times to-day, with great trial of my spirits. I have been carried through the service, upon the whole, better than I could expect. I have been sometimes low, and sometimes tolerably cheerful.

“The death of my mother is a very melancholy dispensation of Divine Providence; and I have not yet had time to meditate upon it, and to lay it to heart as I ought to do. I pray God that it may be sanctified and improved, and that I may learn to imitate the many amiable and respectable qualities which were so conspicuous in my dear and venerable mother.”

The following letter will shew the high estimation in which this excellent lady was held by one of Mr. Belsham's early and most intimate friends, and, doubtless, by many others. This delineation of her character must have been peculiarly soothing to his mind under an affliction which pressed so heavily upon it:

The Rev. J. FULLER to the Rev. THOMAS
BELSHAM.

“Jan. 3, 1781.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“It was not till last Monday I heard of the loss you have sustained by the death of your most valuable mother. I do, indeed, most sincerely sympathise with you. I felt at the moment, and still continue to feel, a poignant sorrow on your account, on the account of the whole family, and of all her connexions. She was, indeed, ‘one of the excellent of the earth.’ Her uncommon discretion and wisdom, her unfeigned and rational piety, her delicate sensibility, will long make her remembrance dear, and her loss regretted by all who knew her. I have spent many a pleasing hour in her society, and had as great a regard for her as for,

any friend with whom I had equal opportunities of intercourse. I revere her memory. Thus much—nay, a great deal more—must all say who knew her. What a noble source of consolation! ‘The memory of the just is blessed,’ and makes survivors so, by laying a most admirable foundation of support, of joy, of triumph. Happy spirit! she is gone to rest. May we imitate her example, imbibe her spirit, and God grant our end (if it please him) may be as tranquil and serene as hers.—I am, your faithful and sympathising friend,

“J. FULLER.”

Mr. Belsham has left few memoranda of the short period which he passed at Worcester before he was recalled to Daventry. The following particulars the writer has obtained from a friend and relative, (Mrs. S. Bache, of Birmingham) whose grandmother (Mrs. Laughner) took great interest in the concerns of the society, and was regarded with the highest respect by the members of it. She was, indeed, as the writer is well assured from some personal knowledge, a lady of great mental ability, of a clear and sound judgment, and of a cultivated and well-informed mind, especially upon religious subjects, and was justly entitled to that attention and influence which she possessed in the society at Worcester. The writer’s correspondent observes, “When Mr. Belsham came to Worcester, the Dissenters had very little intercourse with their neighbours of the Establishment, and the meeting-house was scarcely entered by any of them; but a great change in this respect shortly took place. I

think it was during the first winter of his residence at Worcester, that Mr. Belsham began an evening lecture, which was soon very well attended, and continued to be so all the time that he remained at Worcester. The congregation was usually a very numerous and miscellaneous one, and it became quite fashionable to attend it. In the summer it was always discontinued, the greater part of the audience preferring some other occupation of their time. It has been reported that some of the superior clergy attended this lecture, but this I do not remember.

“At the time Mr. Belsham came to Worcester, there was a circulating Book Society which was dropping fast into decay, but by his exertions was revived and re-organised. He was always president at its meetings, and the principal agent in all its transactions. I am not aware that there was another in the town, and as it had a well-chosen supply of books, it soon became an object of desire and difficulty to become a member of it. The number of subscribers was limited to thirty, and though the majority were Dissenters, Churchmen were not refused. Two or three liberal clergymen became members, and as they met once a month, it brought the parties to a more intimate knowledge of each other, and Mr. Belsham was on friendly terms with some of them. His gentlemanly manners and great attainments did a great deal to lessen the dislike entertained by the generality of church people to the Dissenters.

“Though very young at the time, I am certain of the fact, that whilst at Worcester, Mr. Belsham was

generally esteemed for his pious and faithful discharge of the pastoral duties, by many whose religious character was deservedly respected, and who had too much of the deep seriousness of the old Nonconformists to tolerate any lukewarmness in their minister. Though I cannot recall the particular subjects of discourse, I have a pleasing impression upon my mind of the useful and interesting conversations I have heard him hold with my grandmother and my aunt, and could not but hear with pleasure, that the earliest objects of my reverence and love were held by Mr. Belsham in such high estimation that a common friend had learned to honour them from the terms in which Mr. Belsham, long afterwards, was accustomed to speak of them. It is from my own knowledge, also, I can assert, that Mr. Belsham was the pastor and the friend of the poor in his congregation, visiting them very frequently, entering into their affairs, and attending both to their bodily and their mental wants. It seems probable that if he had continued there, a more liberal feeling would have characterised the Dissenters of Worcester than has done since he left it.

“When Mr. Belsham was invited to Daventry, I well remember how much the idea of his removal was deplored by the congregation, and also by himself. When he was convinced it would be right for him to undertake the care of the Academy, he endeavoured to induce the Trustees to remove the institution to Worcester, and took a great deal of pains to find a proper house for the purpose, and once thought that he had succeeded; but the

Trustees considered it undesirable to have it near the contagion of a fashionable and collegiate city, and would not hear of it.”

It may easily be imagined what satisfaction and pleasure Mr. Belsham had in connexion with a society where his services were so extensively useful and so justly appreciated ; and it is probable he pictured this to himself, as a scene of continued exertion and corresponding success. He little imagined it would be so soon changed for one of a very different character, calling for much greater energy and diligence, severer study and application, and much greater exertion and perseverance. Whatever success, or usefulness, or honour, he might promise himself, he had also to anticipate much anxiety and disappointment; for Mr. Belsham had been too long and intimately acquainted with the Academy at Daventry, not to know that the office of its superintendent was by no means enviable. On the contrary, he was aware that it would be far more arduous and responsible, more trying and laborious, than such situations usually are, both on account of the peculiar constitution of that seminary, from its connexion with the Trustees of Mr. Coward's fund, and dependence upon them, and also from the relaxed, or rather irregular manner in which the internal management and discipline of the Academy had been exercised by his predecessors, of none of whom it could be said, that authority had been supported with uniform consistency and firmness. Accordingly it will be found that a sense of duty, without any regard to his own pleasure and gratification, further than as

these were connected with the discharge of that duty, was the motive by which Mr. Belsham's resolution was determined, and the cause of his removal from Worcester; for at that time nothing was more distant from his thoughts, or more foreign to his inclinations.

The following letter contains his own account of his feelings on the first proposal being made to him for that purpose. From the copy in possession of the present writer, it does not appear to whom it was addressed, but evidently to a friend in whom he reposed great confidence, probably the Rev. Thomas Tayler, of Carter-lane.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ IT is impossible to express to you the surprise I felt last Thursday on receiving a letter from Mr. Paice, which announced to me the unanimous resolution of Mr. Coward's Trustees to invite me to succeed to an office which our excellent friend Mr. Robins had, for some years, sustained with so much honour, but from which the mysterious dispensations of Divine Providence have made it necessary that he should remove.*

“ An application so utterly unthought of and unexpected, fills me with gratitude to those gentlemen

* It may be necessary to inform the reader, that the office of the principal Tutor at Daventry was now vacant. This institution was deprived of the valuable services of its pious and amiable superintendent by a personal affliction, from which he never completely recovered. In consequence of a severe cold, or of some internal weakness, Mr. Robins lost the use of his voice, and ever afterwards, even when his health was re-established, was unable to articulate, but in an under tone, or loud whisper. He lived to a considerable age, but from this time was never able to officiate in any public service.

whose friendly partiality deemed me qualified for so arduous an office. I shall always look upon it as a most honourable testimony of their approbation of my conduct in the office which, for some years, I held at Daventry, the principal merit of which consisted in my sincere endeavour to promote the welfare and improvement of the students, and an unaffected zeal for the honour and prosperity of the seminary with which I was then connected.

“The first wish of my heart relating to this important business is, that it had been the will of Divine Providence to have continued the capacity of usefulness to Mr. Robins, whose distinguished ability and piety so eminently qualified him for the important office he now sustains: the second wish is, that since it has pleased a Being of infinite wisdom to incapacitate Mr. Robins for his public services, that the gentlemen of Mr. Coward’s trust had thought proper to apply to some other gentleman better qualified for the work than the person to whom they have made application, and by that means have relieved me from the distressing dilemma in which I now stand.

“I should have been glad to have complied with Mr. Paice’s request, and to have written an immediate answer, if it were in my power. And indeed my first thoughts were to write a negative answer by return of post. But I afterwards considered, that thus to dismiss the affair without any deliberation, would be making a very unworthy return to those gentlemen who had paid me the compliment of the invitation. I resolved, therefore, to take the

affair into the most mature consideration, and to consult a few of my friends, particularly Mr. Orton, upon the subject. The result of our deliberation I will now lay before you ; and I take the liberty of addressing this letter to you, Sir, as being perfectly acquainted both with Worcester and Daventry. You will, therefore, be best able to judge of the circumstances which I may state, and the difficulties that may arise upon the subject.

“ The difficulties relating to the boarding of the family, and the raising a sum of money sufficient to carry on the business of the academy, are by no means small. I have not the vanity to think that I possess those qualifications for conducting the business of the lectures, which the partiality of my friends represents ; but after all, the grand, and I think the only insurmountable difficulty, is the removal from Worcester to Daventry.

“ I believe, Sir, you are sufficiently acquainted with the state of both these congregations to be aware, that it would be impossible to remove hence to Daventry without the greatest reluctance ; and there are some circumstances which render a removal at this time almost utterly impracticable. I have not the least fault to find with the behaviour of the congregation at Daventry to me, personally. On the contrary, I am greatly indebted to them for their friendship and partial regard ; yet I have great objections against fixing my lot there. Not to mention the abatement of salary, and the utter want of society in that neighbourhood, the temper and spirit of the people are utterly averse to what I approve. Their disrespectful behaviour to Mr.

Robins, and their unexampled treatment of Mr. Tayler, were enough to strike any minister with terror at the thought of settling there.

“ Worcester does not appear to me an ineligible situation for the academy. It also happens that there is a house now at liberty, which, I think, might easily be fitted up for the purpose. I add, that almost all the neighbouring ministers and congregations are moderate, and friendly disposed to the interests of the Daventry Academy; most of the ministers having been educated there. The principal objection would undoubtedly arise from the expense; but this I apprehend might be considerably relieved. I have only to add, that Mr. Orton is much on the side of its being removed, and indeed first suggested the idea.

“ If Mr. Coward’s Trustees should think the scheme I have mentioned at all meriting their attention, I will write more fully upon it in my next letter; or if it be more agreeable, I can wait upon them in London; or perhaps the best scheme of all might be, if not too much trouble, that one or two of them should come down to Worcester. Mr. Urwick will be able to give every degree of information upon the subject.

“ In whatever manner this important business shall be finally settled, I hope that Divine Providence will so order it, that the interest of religion, and of the respectable seminary under the direction of Mr. Coward’s Trustees, may be promoted; and whether I shall be connected with it or not, I shall always think myself under great obligation to the gentlemen whose partiality has done me the honour

of applying to me upon this interesting occasion. I beg my respectful compliments to them. I shall be very desirous of hearing from you, and I remain, dear Sir, your very affectionate friend, &c.,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.”

However Mr. Belsham might be surprised by the application of Mr. Coward's Trustees, their knowledge of the ability with which he had filled the department which he previously occupied at Daventry, and the reputation he had acquired in the short interval of his settlement at Worcester, naturally directed their thoughts to him, and the general opinion of the friends of the institution justified the measure. It appears, however, that the Rev. Samuel Palmer, of Hackney, Mr. Belsham's senior in age and standing, as connected with a congregation, a most respectable and experienced minister, of considerable talent and acquirement, had been thought to be a proper person to succeed Mr. Robins in the arduous office of Presiding Tutor at Daventry. This gentleman was well known to the public as the editor of the Nonconformists' Memorial, was intimately connected with the Trustees and others who were friendly to the institution, and was himself greatly interested in its support and respectability, and in many respects was well qualified to superintend the Academy, and direct the studies of the pupils. In Mr. Belsham's own opinion, Mr. Palmer was the person to whom Mr. Coward's Trustees would make the first application on this important occasion. The high respect with which Mr. Belsham had often spoken of Mr.

Palmer, and his decided conviction of his ability and suitable qualification for the office, among other causes, might have produced the general expectation that the application of the Trustees would be made to him. In his correspondence with Mr. Palmer, Mr. Belsham had expressed this conviction, and his wish that Mr. Palmer would accede to the proposal. The following letter was written in consequence of such intimation, and shews the esteem with which these gentlemen regarded each other.

The Rev. S. PALMER to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“I intended answering your former letter in a few days, but your last is on a subject so much more important, that I feel myself constrained to reply to it immediately, though I have not time to write in the manner I could wish. But I am determined that this shall not be quite so mysterious as you say my former letter was. I will write as plainly as I can, and exercise all that freedom and faithfulness which you desire, and which I am happy you think you have hitherto experienced in your intercourse and correspondence with me.

“I think the Trustees have discovered great wisdom in the choice which they have made. I will not enter into any debate with you respecting my qualifications. I am much obliged to you for the favourable sentiments you have been pleased so often to express concerning them; but could I have been of your mind, I think I should not have accepted the office, had it been proposed to me. As the case is, I could not have taken it into considera-

tion, for a moment. I remember you have repeatedly told me, what I cannot but approve as a good maxim, ‘Not to refuse a thing till it is offered.’ But if a person really wishes not to have the offer, and is perpetually told of the probability of its being made, I think it cannot be amiss to express his own feelings. Mr. Robins has more than once expressed to me his wishes in regard to this matter. I have used the strongest language I could to prevent his taking any steps to procure me an invitation ; and I have repeatedly said things in the hearing of Mr. Tayler, when some of our brethren have mentioned the common report of my going to Daventry, which must have satisfied him that I never should accept the office. I well knew that I should not, if I had been put to the trial, and I thought it best that such an offer should not be refused. But I do not know, and I cannot believe, that I should have had the offer, if I had not expressed myself in such a manner as this. However, be that as it may, the letter was sent to the right person, for I can truly say, and you know that I am not used to compliment, that I think you, upon the whole, the fittest person of all my acquaintance. I will not attempt to enumerate your qualifications, much less to prove to you wherein you are superior to myself ; the question is, could any person be fixed upon so well qualified to fill this important office? I am persuaded not.

“ After this I need not give you my advice, with regard to accepting the office. I think, though it is so important as to deserve deliberation, the matter is so clear, that you cannot be greatly at a

loss to determine which is the path of duty. It would give me great pleasure to make you a visit at this time ; and if I thought there was any danger of your declining the offer, and that I could have any influence to engage you to accept it, I would certainly make you a visit for this purpose. But I hope it is unnecessary. As I have taken my journey for the summer, I must now stay at home, at least for a few months. Adieu, my dear friend ; I heartily wish you the Divine direction in this very important affair.

“ Your affectionate friend and obedient servant,

“SAMUEL PALMER.

“ *Hackney, June 13, 1781.*”

The application of Mr. Coward's Trustees naturally became the subject of Mr. Belsham's correspondence with his family at Bedford. Some intimation of his intentions, of his difficulties, and of the assistance which he needed, drew from his sister that expression of regard, and of her readiness to meet his wishes, which is contained in the following letter :

MISS BELSHAM to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“ MY DEAR BROTHER,

“ I believe nobody but yourself has been, or will be, surprised at the application the Trustees have made to you to remove to Daventry. For my own part, I fully expected it. I cannot say that it is a situation that I wished, either for you or myself ; but if you think it upon the whole advisable to accept of it, I have too great a regard for you to

refuse doing what is in my power to assist in the management of your family, and happy shall I be, if I can in any way contribute to your ease and comfort. You have, my dear brother, my most fervent wishes and prayers that you may be enabled to determine upon that plan which will most conduce to your usefulness and happiness.—I remain, ever, your obliged and affectionate sister,

“ELIZABETH BELSHAM.

“*June 14, 1781.*”

The well-regulated state of Mr. Belsham's mind, and the principle upon which he acted, will be clearly seen in the following extract from a letter to his highly valued friend, the Rev. Timothy Kenrick, at that time Assistant Tutor at Daventry, in the department which Mr. Belsham himself had filled before his removal to Worcester.

— June 28th, 1781. “What I particularly wished to mention to you, and on account of it I am particularly desirous of seeing you at Worcester, is, that the Trustees have thought proper to make application to me to succeed Mr. Robins. The affair is, on my part, wholly unexpected, and has thrown me into the most perplexing and painful dilemma. I just put the question to the Trustees, whether the Academy might be removed to Worcester; but they have returned a direct negative. The question now is, whether to accept the invitation and go to Daventry, or to decline the offer and continue at Worcester. Inclination and the wishes of my friends here would lead to the latter; but I

am not clear which way duty would direct. To accept the Academy would be attended with very great difficulties, and I seem to myself to be sacrificing every favourite inclination and prospect in life; and yet I hope I should not be unwilling to make this sacrifice, if I was sure that it was right. But I am far from being clear that I am qualified for it, or that it would be right, either in a moral or a prudential view, to engage in such a painful office. My own judgment revolts against it; and in short, I hardly know which way to turn myself. I am determined, however, to bring the matter to as speedy an issue as possible, and only wait for an answer to letters which I have written to Mr. Orton and to Mr. Urwick, in order to form my final determination. Whichever way this may be, I am sure I shall always have your friendly wishes, and earnest prayers for direction and assistance from above."

Mr. Belsham's strong reluctance to undertake the arduous and responsible office of the superintending Tutor at Daventry was only overcome by a sense of duty, and the unanimous and concurrent advice and persuasion of his friends, and of those who were warmly interested in the support and success of the institution. The following are Mr. Orton's sentiments, in reply to the letter mentioned by Mr. Belsham when writing to Mr. Kenrick :

"DEAR SIR,

"Though you have many friends more able to advise and assist you in the important concern which lies before you than myself, yet I am per-

suaded you have none who would be more ready and glad to give you any assistance in his power.

“I have long thought Daventry an improper place for the Academy. I do not think the house or the situation unhealthy. We were more crowded, and had less air at Northampton, yet I never heard of any complaints of its being injurious to the health of the students. I have long thought from what I have heard of the Academy at Shrewsbury, and from what I knew of our institution at Northampton, that there are fewer temptations in a large, polite town, where many of the Dissenters are persons of property, figure, and genteel behaviour, than there are in such a town as Daventry, where the pupils would have little acquaintance and commerce with any but a lower rank of people. The acquaintance which the pupils would have in a larger, politer town, would contribute to polish them, and teach them a better manner of behaviour and address than many of the Daventry pupils have had, and for want of which their acceptance and usefulness have been considerably injured. My principal objection against Worcester is the want of a proper house in the city, and the very great expense which must attend the removal of the furniture, library, &c., as well as fitting up rooms for its reception.

“It would grieve me much to have you torn from Worcester, though to fill up a station of so much importance, and to be so worthy and suitable a head of so respectable a society, are reasons why your attachment to Worcester should be got over, if other circumstances should incline you to hearken

to the proposal; though I much question whether your present flock can find so acceptable a pastor, or one so suited to a large and polite city.

“ You would undoubtedly be very acceptable, and I hope useful, as a minister at Daventry, and have many opportunities of usefulness in the neighbouring churches, which you have not at Worcester, at least to an equal degree. This deserves consideration; but as you know Worcester and Daventry better than I, I must leave you to judge for yourself.

“ I have Dr. Johnstone’s direction to give it you as his opinion, that Worcester is more proper for such a seminary than Daventry; and that with due care of your health, and what assistance you will have from the preaching pupils, the work will not be too much for your health and spirits, of which I owned myself in some apprehension.

“ But I am ashamed to write so much upon a subject about which I cannot quite satisfy my own mind, and concerning which I can give you so little light. I can only add, that it is my daily sincere and earnest prayer, that you may have divine direction in this important concern, and have the way of duty made plain before you. I am sure of this, that the care of the Academy is of much more moment to our interest, and to the concerns of religion among us, than the care of any particular congregation,—that you have very desirable qualifications for discharging so important a trust well and honourably,—and I have no doubt, if God continues your life, of your being very acceptable to the pupils, and very useful in this station. But still I

could wish the Academy removed to Worcester, if it could be done consistently with the engagements of the Trustees. Yet it would on many accounts be desirable that you should remove to Daventry, where you will have so much less trouble in settling, and be at so much less expense. Upon the whole, I do so much wish you at the head of the Academy, so much of the credit and support of the interest depends upon it, that if there be insuperable objections to removing it from Daventry, I would by all means advise your going thither, especially as the congregation will, I presume, send you a hearty and unanimous invitation. May God direct you in all your ways, and prosper all your attempts to serve the interests of religion! Though I cannot work myself, I love to see others work, and wish to exert the little power I have to assist and encourage them in the service of our great Master.—I am, dear Sir, your affectionate and faithful friend, and humble servant,

“JOB ORTON.

“*June 28, 1781.*”

In a postscript Mr. Orton adds the following quotation from a letter received from Mr. Robins:

“I hope Mr. Belsham will be encouraged to undertake the work, many as its difficulties are, being, on the whole, perhaps, the properest person for this department. His abilities, natural and acquired, are great. He is very serious and zealous, capable of great application and despatch, and stands high in the estimation both of the Academy and the congregation.”

Almost immediately on receiving the application from Mr. Coward's Trustees, Mr. Belsham acquainted his friends at Worcester with the object of it, and consulted some of those on whose judgment he greatly relied. An affectionate invitation to continue with them was presented to him by the congregation in the beginning of July; but Mr. Belsham thought it right to have an interview with the Trustees before he came to a final decision, and went to London for that purpose. The result may easily be conjectured; and the opinion and advice of his friend, as expressed in the following letter, would have considerable weight in forming his determination.

The Rev. TIMOTHY KENRICK to the Rev.
THOMAS BELSHAM.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“It gave me the most sincere pleasure to find that the Trustees have made you an offer of the Academy at Daventry. It has always been my secret but earnest wish, from the time that Mr. Robins was disqualified for the business, that they would fix upon you to succeed him, and you will now disappoint all my hopes, if you refuse to listen to the application. In these wishes, I believe I am joined by all those who are acquainted with you, and have the Dissenting interest at heart.

“Whatever you may think of yourself, it seems to me, so far as I can judge of your circumstances, that your way, in the present instance, is clearly marked out. I cannot find one solid objection to your acceptance of the invitation. Your services

will be highly acceptable to the congregation at Daventry; and though your friends at Worcester will be very unwilling to lose you, there is no occasion on which they would so evidently see the propriety of acquiescing in your removal as the present. The twelve years which you have already spent at Daventry make you perfectly acquainted with every thing there, so that you can come with more confidence and less trouble than any other person. That part of the business of the Academy which is new to you, will be very easy in a short time, and you are better acquainted with the preparatory studies than any other tutor before you, at his first coming. Your influence with the students is such as will secure you the highest respect, and enable you to establish regularity and good government; and as to the Assistants, I believe you know our regard for you too well to suspect that we should not do every thing in our power to make your situation comfortable and happy. Your sisters will superintend domestic affairs for you, and I am persuaded, from what I have the pleasure to know of them, will do it in such a manner as to afford perfect satisfaction to yourself, and to please all the family. When I consider all these things, I cannot help thinking, you are the man which Providence, as well as the voice of your friends, has marked out for the undertaking. You know that it is an employment which affords an opportunity of doing much good in the world, and I think I can perceive that, in your hands, and under the blessing of God, it would be peculiarly useful. I only wish, that you may see the thing in the same light, and then

I have no doubt you will be ready to make every proper sacrifice to promote so valuable a purpose. I cannot conclude without again expressing my hearty wish, that you would accept the invitation. There are many other motives, which I could mention, that ought to induce you to adopt this measure ; but they have been already suggested to you by your friends, and my opinion can add no weight to the judgment of much wiser men whom you have consulted, and of whose approbation you are secure. I desire to commit the affair to divine direction, and pray that God would lead you to that determination which may be the most for his honour and your own comfort.—I am affectionately yours,

“TIMOTHY KENRICK.

“*July* 14, 1781.”

On his return from London, Mr. Belsham, as might be expected, was more inclined to listen to the proposal of Mr. Coward's Trustees ; but still a distrust of himself, and of his ability to discharge the important duties of the office he was invited to undertake, created a disinclination and reluctance to place himself in so responsible a situation, which he could scarcely overcome. His attachment to his friends at Worcester, and their repeated and strenuous efforts to secure his continuance among them, would proportionably affect his mind, and produce a degree of indecision which a sense of duty only was sufficient to remove. Much of this feeling is displayed in the following letter :

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. T. KENRICK.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“I thank you for your friendly prejudice in my favour, and for the kind arguments which you make use of to engage me to accept the invitation of the Trustees.—If I had but half as good an opinion of myself as your partiality leads you to entertain for me, I should have no doubt of the part I ought to take. But I am too conscious of my own imperfections and infirmities not to be extremely diffident in forming a determination upon a question of so much importance, not only to myself, but to the Dissenting interest at large, and to the interest of religion, so far as that is connected with it.—In short, I have not yet returned an answer to Mr. Coward’s Trustees, though I believe they expected one some weeks ago. But my suspicion about my qualification for the office, and the united, affectionate solicitation of my friends here, have hitherto occasioned a delay.

“I believe no person was ever called to make a greater sacrifice upon such an occasion than I.—I look upon myself as happy in a situation beyond the common lot of my brethren, in the united and most affectionate attachment of my whole congregation. I have no motive nor wish to remove; and if I know my own heart, nothing but a sense of duty should induce me to this step. If the charge of the Academy be an honour, it is an honour of which I am not ambitious; if it is said to be profitable, it is an advantage of which I am not covetous. I have now enough to live upon in the

manner in which I have always been used to live, and more than that I do not desire ; and by accepting the Academy I should consider myself as sinking from a state of independence, ease, and peace, to a state of dependence, slavery, care, and sorrow.

“ Yet I do not deny, that there are many considerations which have a tendency to reconcile my mind to the thought of removing to Daventry,—the friendly disposition of the Assistant Tutors, and the affectionate invitation which I have received from the congregation, are not the least. But what, if I know myself, weighs with me more than any thing, is the sense of duty, and the prospect of more extensive usefulness. Could I bring myself to believe that I was properly qualified for the task, this consideration would abundantly overbalance all my own fears, as well as all the kind solicitations of my friends to continue here.

“ I am in a great strait, in the most painful dilemma to which I was ever reduced. May the grace and providence of God direct my steps, and influence me to a right determination in this important concern ! I am sure that your prayers will be united with mine upon this interesting occasion.

“ A deputation of my friends intends to call upon me to-morrow with a unanimous petition from the congregation that I would continue my labours among them. I have promised not to determine any thing till after I have conversed with them upon the subject. But as upon the maturest deliberation it appears to me, at present, that duty requires my removal ; and as I do not expect that any thing will be offered to-morrow more than what

I already know and have considered, I think it most probable my answer to the Trustees will be in the affirmative. I have told you the whole affair as it now stands. If any thing particular occurs here, I will let you know. I shall be very glad to hear from you soon. I am, my dear friend, your affectionate and obliged friend and servant,

“T. BELSHAM.

“*Worcester, July 19, 1781.*”

An address (dated July 18th) was accordingly prepared, of which the following is a copy, and was presented a few days afterwards by some of the leading members of the society. Hopeless as the case might appear, the congregation at Worcester could not be satisfied without making another effort to prevail with their beloved pastor to comply with their earnest and affectionate wishes.

To the Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM.

“REV. AND DEAR SIR,

“It was matter of the greatest concern to the members of, and subscribers to, the religious society under your pastoral care, when we heard of an invitation you had received from Mr. Coward’s Trustees to take the charge of the Academy at Daventry; and though we look upon that seminary as a most important one, and particularly so to the interests of the Protestant Dissenters at large, and no one more proper than yourself to fill up the vacancy on the resignation of good Mr. Robins, yet you will permit us, very dear Sir, to plead against your leaving us, which we most sincerely dread, and wish

that any thing we may or can say may have sufficient weight with you to keep you amongst us.

“ To begin with what must be of the greatest importance, and matter of the greatest joy to a minister of the gospel, your labours amongst us have been blessed by an increase of members to the church;—your preaching and other parts of your ministerial labours have been very acceptable and pleasing, not only to your constant hearers, but to very many occasional ones, who have attended with great seriousness, and, we have reason to believe, with profit and advantage:—and we do most earnestly entreat you to take into your most serious consideration the importance you are of, to the cause of the Dissenting interest in this place, and how greatly we fear it will be affected by your removal.—Your private life, also, as well as your public labours, has so highly and so justly endeared you to us all, that it makes the thought of separation more distressing.—Consider, dear Sir, how lately we have experienced how painful a separation from a beloved pastor is: our sufferings on that account were so very great, and so very recent, that we dread, and, if consistent with the will of God, pray we may not again be exercised with the same trial. What can we say sufficiently expressive of the warmth of affection which we feel, when we plead for your continuing among us as our beloved pastor? And our earnest wishes are, that you may see it your duty so to do. But if, after all we have said, it should appear to you to be your duty to accept the invitation of Mr. Coward’s Trustees, to the great Head of the church we must leave it, and if

we are to be bereaved, it will be our constant and united prayer to the throne of grace to afford you that wisdom which is profitable to direct; and to own, bless, and succeed all your endeavours, both public and private, in whatever situation your lot in life may be cast.—We are, rev. and dear Sir, your most affectionate and respectful, humble servants.

Signed by more than eighty persons of the congregation.

Having taken sufficient time to weigh the proposal made to him, and to consult his most intimate and judicious friends upon it, Mr. Belsham formed his decision in favour of Daventry, and addressed the following letter to Mr. Paice, signifying his acceptance of the important office he was solicited to undertake, and his intention to enter upon it at the time mentioned.

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to JOSEPH PAICE, Esq.

“DEAR SIR,

“Having had the honour to receive an application from the gentlemen of Mr. Coward’s trust, to undertake the offices of Principal and Resident in the Academy at Daventry, in succession to Mr. Robins, and upon the same terms and plan that he and his predecessor, Dr. Ashworth, held and administered these offices, I now beg leave to acquaint you, Sir, and the other gentlemen in the trust, that I have at length, after mature deliberation, thought proper to accept that important charge, and that I propose, God willing, to remove to Da-

ventry at the commencement of the approaching session. I flatter myself that, so long as I continue to discharge the duties of that office with fidelity and diligence, as far as my abilities will reach, I shall meet with all that countenance and assistance from the gentlemen in the trust which the exigency of the circumstances may require; and I cheerfully look up to the great Disposer of events for a blessing upon our united endeavours, in favour of an institution, the great object of which is to support the interests of truth, virtue, and religion.

“The delay of this answer for so much longer a time than I had given reason to expect, requires some apology, and I am confident that the sensibility of the gentlemen to whom this apology is made will plead in my favour, when I inform them, that this delay was entirely occasioned by a unanimous and most affectionate address from my friends at Worcester to continue my pastoral labours among them; an address which was presented to me the last Lord’s-day, and which certainly merited the most respectful attention, though I could not see it to be my duty to comply with their request.

“I have only further to inform the gentlemen of the trust, that my eldest sister is willing to superintend the domestic economy of the family, and that we propose to remove to Daventry on the 14th of August. Any letter or directions which the gentlemen may think proper to send before that time, will reach me at Worcester, to which place I propose to return in the course of the next week. My best compliments attend Mr. Farmer, Mr. Tayler, and

yourself.—I am, dear Sir, your and their obedient and obliged servant,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.

“*Bedford, July 28, 1781.*”

Before Mr. Belsham left Bedford, he communicated his determination to his friends at Worcester. Doubtless it was received with the sincerest regret, and was not less painful to himself, though accompanied by the consciousness of an unfeigned desire to follow the leadings of Divine Providence, and to obey the call of duty, whatever its appointment might be. The following is a copy of Mr. Belsham's address to the society :

TO THE TRUSTEES, COMMUNICANTS, AND SUBSCRIBERS
OF THE PROTESTANT DISSENTING CONGREGATION
MEETING IN ANGEL STREET, WORCESTER.

“MY DEAR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

“Your late cordial and unanimous application to me to continue the exercise of the pastoral office among you, is replete with sentiments of affection and esteem so far beyond my pretensions or deserts, that I know not in what terms to express my gratitude to you for your friendly partiality, and only wish that my very imperfect but sincere endeavours to serve your immortal interests had been more worthy of that approbation and respect which you so candidly express, and which affords me one of the most exalted pleasures which a faithful minister can feel.

“An address so unanimous and affectionate, enforced as it was by my own most favourite wish

and inclinations, would without any difficulty have surmounted every obstacle but that which arises from a powerful, commanding sense of duty. Enlisted under the banners of my great Captain, I feel myself bound to remove to whatever station he thinks proper to appoint, however trying, hazardous, or painful;—and to the kind remonstrances and solicitations of my friends I have only to oppose the language of the Apostle: ‘What, mean ye to weep and to break my heart?’ I am ready to resign not only my dearest earthly connexions and prospects, but even life itself, at the command of Christ, so that he may but be magnified in me, whether by life or death, and his cause and interest be promoted in the world.

“Influenced, I trust, by these considerations alone, and judging, upon the most serious and impartial attention which I could give to a subject of such great importance, that it is the will of the Master whom I serve that I should remove hence to a more arduous post, I have broke through all those tender and engaging ties by which I have been, with increasing affection and esteem, so closely connected with you, and have communicated to Mr. Coward’s Trustees my final resolution to accept the charge of the Academy at Daventry.

“My residence among you will now be very short. I must resign the pastoral charge at Michaelmas, and my avocations during the interval will be numerous. I think of the critical circumstances to which you will be reduced with a tenderness and distress which almost overwhelm me. But I trust that the great Shepherd will soon

provide you with another pastor, who will have it more in his power, though it is impossible he should have it more in his heart, to promote your best interests than your present. All that is in my power, whether of advice or assistance, you have a right to claim ; and be assured that the most fervent prayers on your account shall daily be offered at the throne of grace.

“ I have written you a letter of friendship, and not of form. To have done otherwise would have been injustice to the feelings of my heart. I have now only to request an interest in your affectionate and devout addresses to the Father of lights, and to subscribe myself, with the truest cordiality and esteem, your obedient and most affectionate friend, brother, and servant,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ *Worcester, Aug. 6, 1781.*”

Though Mr. Belsham entered on his office at Daventry at the time mentioned, he did not take his final leave of his friends at Worcester till the 9th of the following month, when he addressed them in a farewell discourse from Phil. i. 27: “ Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel ;” which he concluded with the following expression of his regard for the society with which he had been connected, and his devout wishes for their spiritual improvement and welfare :

“The grand object and desire of a faithful minister concerning the people of his charge is, ‘that they may order their conversation becoming the gospel, that they may stand fast with one spirit, and with one mind strive together for the faith of Christ.’—While he continues with them, it is his earnest desire and prayer to see this temper and spirit prevailing among them, and to contribute his utmost endeavours to promote faith and holiness, steadfastness and peace; and if the providence of God should at any time see fit to remove him from his charge, it will be his concern to hear of the affairs of his flock, and it will afford him unspeakable joy to learn that they continue steadfast in their adherence to Christ, and that they walk worthy of that gospel which is a doctrine of holiness, of truth, and of peace.

“Permit me, my friends, to add, that these are the genuine sentiments of my heart at this time, in regard to you. I feel a grateful sense of the uncommon attention and kindness I have met with from you, during my abode with you, and my labours among you. Happy should I have thought myself, had it been my divine Master’s pleasure, that I should have continued my ministerial services among you,—and now that, in obedience to the appointment and the call of Providence, I am removing to a distant scene, not knowing what things shall befall me there, the best return I can make for all your kindness, and the best wish I can form for you, is that of the Apostle for his generous and affectionate friends at Philippi: ‘Only let your conversation be as becomes the gospel of Christ; stand

fast in one spirit, and strive together with one mind for the faith of the gospel.'

"If such, my Christian friends, be your temper and character, it will inspire a pleasing hope, that my entrance unto you, and my labours among you, have not been in vain; and however it may please God to dispose of my future lot, whether I am permitted to come and visit you again, or am constrained to remain absent from you, I shall still look forward with unspeakable satisfaction and delight to that day when we shall have a glorious meeting at the tribunal of Christ, and shall be for ever with each other and with the Lord. If, therefore, my brethren, there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, fulfil ye this my desire and my joy, and let the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus.

"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace be with you all. Amen and amen."

Mr. Belsham's own observations on his short residence at Worcester may properly be introduced at this period of his history. There is a striking contrast in the language in which he speaks of himself, and that in which he is spoken of by those who were well acquainted with his character, who were improved and edified by his services, and who were cordially attached to him; but it only shews how far he was from entertaining those high thoughts of himself, with which his merit and his talents, and the universal respect and attention

with which he was regarded, might have inspired him. It must also be recollected, that the reflection is made on the review of this period at the distance of five and twenty years, when his acquired habits of severe and diligent study, and his great attainments in knowledge, would dispose him to consider the exertions and applications of his early life as comparatively trifling and insignificant. The following quotation is made from his diary of the year 1806 :

“Here (at Worcester) I passed three very pleasant years. I saw something of the world, and was introduced into company ; but I almost forgot my studies, and became very idle, reading little or nothing but the society’s books. I had, however, some very pleasant friends, whose company and conversation entertained and benefited me.”

It may be useless to conjecture what would have been Mr. Belsham’s character and attainments if he had continued at Worcester ; but it is probable that he would have made no peculiar exertions, and might have had no opportunity of displaying any extraordinary ability. The discharge of the duty which he had to perform must have been comparatively easy. To him the composition of sermons was never a very arduous task ; the knowledge which he had acquired was sufficient to place him in an advantageous position with respect to his brethren in the ministry, and his character and manners rendered him highly acceptable to the society with which he was connected. Though he was younger than some of the neighbouring ministers, there were few, if any of them, who equalled

him in talent or information, or who would not have been ready to acknowledge his superiority. He would, therefore, have had little stimulus to any extraordinary application and diligence; his mind would gradually have become fixed in the belief of the truth of that system of doctrine and religion in which he had been educated, and which he then professed, as the result of careful study and investigation; and if he had ever been induced to enter on its defence, or to shew the fallacy of other religious opinions, it is not very probable he would have done it with that close examination of the Scriptures, with that deliberate examination of the best commentators upon them, and with that repeated and calm revision of his own sentiments and those of others, which would have terminated in any material change of his convictions. His removal to Daventry was therefore a removal, not only to a situation in which the sphere of his duties was enlarged, and in which his exertion must be greater and more efficient, but in which he was called to examine more attentively the several systems of religious faith which were to be the subjects of discussion in his lectures to his pupils, to estimate the weight of evidence by which they were respectively supported, and to determine their agreement or disagreement with the language of Christ and his apostles, and with the doctrines taught and inculcated by them. To the necessity of such study and investigation may be ascribed the change which ultimately took place in Mr. Belsham's sentiments, and brought him into intimate connexion with persons to whom he had formerly

been opposed, and placed him in situations of the greatest importance and influence among that class of believers with which he connected himself.

The conviction that Mr. Belsham's talents and attainments eminently qualified him for the office in which he was solicited to engage, was so general, that immediately on its being known that he had acceded to the wishes of Mr. Coward's 'Trustees, he received numerous letters from his friends, expressive of their high satisfaction in the decision which he had made, and their confident assurance that the interest of the Dissenters would be greatly supported by his exertions, and the reputation of the Academy be established under his superintendence. The following will on other accounts be interesting to the reader :

The Rev. JOB ORTON to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I have felt, and still feel, very much for you in the circumstances in which you have lately been, and the important concern you have had upon your mind. I ventured to write to you freely upon the subject, but could not see your way to leave Worcester so clear as to free my mind from all doubts about it, though I thought the arguments in favour of a removal to Daventry preponderated. I have every day borne you upon my heart before God, in the best manner I could, which indeed is a very imperfect one, that you might be directed in this important concern. And now you have determined upon a removal, I must give you my opinion, that I think you have acted right, and that I rejoice in

your determination and am thankful for it, which hath such a favourable aspect on our interest, and the advancing of true religion. I know how much pleasure it will give to the present pupils, and I have not the least doubt but they will rejoice in such a successor to their late worthy Tutor; and I hope they will, as I have largely advised and urged those of them whom I know, behave to you as they ought to do, and endeavour to make your work as easy and comfortable as possible. I never had the least doubt of your ability to discharge the duties of such a station in such a manner as will be honourable to yourself and advantageous to your pupils, and highly creditable and serviceable to our interest. And I now have nothing further to say than to assure you of my best wishes and continued prayers, that you may have much comfort, and be eminently useful in this station. In my weak and declining state, I know not that I can be of any service to you in any other way. But probably you have seen, or may have from Mr. Robins, a long letter I wrote to Dr. Ashworth* concerning the management of the Academy, and in which I mentioned some instances in which I think our worthy Tutor failed, through the excess of his good-nature. I was the more ready to write to him at large, and with a freedom not quite so modest and diffident as perhaps became me, because he was younger than myself, was my pupil at Northampton, and I had spent seven years or more in Dr. Doddridge's family, and I knew the state of things there better

* This was published in Orton's Letters to Dissenting Ministers, Vol. I. No. I., by the Rev. Samuel Palmer.

than most. Probably, if Mr. Robins hath not destroyed that letter, you may like to see it, and there you will at least see my concern for the credit of the Academy, and the good behaviour and improvement of the pupils. If I can in any way be of service to you, I shall be very glad; but my days of service are nearly over, and my powers of body and mind are so much impaired, that I can be of little use or significance in life.

“I am sorry for the people at Worcester, and heartily wish that the great Head of the church, for their sake, for yours, and for the advancement of religion, may direct them to a suitable choice, and set a faithful pastor over them. I have not heard from Mr. Robins since the beginning of his vacation, nor do I know what he intends to do with himself. I think of him and feel for him with great tenderness and no little pain, and wish he may be fixed in some agreeable situation.

“I hear nothing from London, and therefore cannot tell what Coward’s Trustees have determined, or whether they have determined any thing about ——— as a trustee. I hope he will not be chosen. But I hope you will neither be afraid of him nor yield to him, if he should expect any thing from you which you do not quite approve. You are, and will be, Tutor to many others besides their pupils, and therefore they have no right to dictate to you.—Pray can you tell me what an honest friend of mine, a divine, meant, by intimating to me in a letter lately, that he was not quite pleased with the choice of Mr. Belsham, for he thought that all our Academies but Carmarthen would be in the

hands of persons who were far gone from evangelical principles? I wrote to him in answer, in which I rebuked him sharply for his narrowness, and told him with great confidence, that he was entirely mistaken as to you, and that you were as evangelical as himself, except that you did not use some phrases that he might do, and were as far from Dr. Priestley's and Dr. Enfield's sentiments as himself. You see what you must expect from narrow spirits, and will arm yourself against being any way influenced by their insinuations.

“But I must break off. This letter has been almost the whole work of three days. I sit and write with pain and uneasiness, and am seldom free from them. I hope for your continued prayers that I may be some way useful to the last, and be freed by divine influence from those uneasy doubts and fears which depress my spirits and weaken my comfort and hope.—I am, dear Sir, your very affectionate and faithful friend and humble servant,

“JOB ORTON.

“*August 8, 1781.*”

The Rev. T. KENRICK to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“It gives me great pleasure to think that you have accepted the charge of the Academy. The object before you was of great importance to your own happiness and the interests of religion; you are therefore sufficiently justified in delaying your determination some time longer. The sacrifices you make are great and valuable; the attachment of your friends at Worcester was uncommonly af-

fectionate, and the prospect you had before you very promising; yet while you look back to Worcester with regret, you have the pleasure to reflect that you left it with a view to promote more extensively the interests of religion, and to follow the plain intimations of Providence. This thought must be your support, if you should meet with more labour and vexation in your new situation than in the agreeable situation which you have left. The fears which you entertain are natural to one who is entering upon a new way of living, and who is proportionably sensible of the importance of the work; but however well founded they may seem to you, to your friends they appear to be groundless apprehensions, and they doubt not they will appear in the same light to you, after a short trial.

— “I conclude, my dear friend, with offering up my sincere wishes and earnest prayers for your happiness and the success of your future labours, and to promote this purpose I hope soon to contribute every thing which my feeble efforts can produce.—Yours affectionately,

“T. KENRICK.*

“*August 14, 1781.*”

* Mr. Belsham has paid a just tribute to the integrity, abilities, disinterested exertions, and extensive usefulness of his esteemed and lamented friend, in his *Memoir of the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey*, pp. 304, et seq. Any further testimony or encomium can add nothing to the reputation of this zealous and faithful advocate of divine truth. There are many still living, who remember with gratitude his valuable services, both as a minister and a friend, and whose ardent desire and hope must be to meet him in the regions of immortality. The present writer considers it as the privilege of his early life that he was admitted to the intimacy and friendship of this excellent man, “*quo nemo vir melior natus est, nemo pietate præstantior.*”

The Rev. RADCLIFFE SCHOLEFIELD to the Rev.
T. BELSHAM.

[Having in the former part of this letter furnished Mr. Belsham with a receipt for polishing tables and other furniture, he continues :]

“ And now let me tell you, that if you could with the same ease and certainty polish and improve the minds of your pupils as you may your tables, how much would your situation be to be envied! But, alas! a certain uniform receipt for this purpose is like the philosopher’s stone, never to be found; and though from the first impulse of our wishes, we are apt to cry, Alas! and would rejoice in the discovery, perhaps upon further reflection it might prove, like the former, a fatal instead of a useful discovery. I have sometimes thought, that to find out this art of instruction is to find out ourselves, that is, to see what were our views, inclinations, and sentiments at the same period, and what treatment, motives, and arguments had then the greatest weight in giving a turn and bias to them. But how far do we advance by this? Only the gaining the experience of one individual, who may have had from the first as different a culture as the sturdy oak and the tender pine-apple. We have, however, my friend, you in a higher, and myself in a lower gradation, the pleasure to think that, however difficult this task, if we do succeed, the end attained is the most honourable and glorious. I doubt not the thoughts of this will ever keep up and animate your spirits. You enter upon your office, I am satisfied, with the high approbation of

all, and with the warmest esteem and affection of those who will be under your roof. And that your difficulties may be as few and your success as great as in this mixed state can reasonably be expected; that your mind may be supported, strengthened, and animated in your office, and your health, strength, and capacity for usefulness be long continued, is the sincere and fervent wish and prayer of your affectionate friend,

“RAD. SCHOLEFIELD.

“*Birmingham, Sept. 17, 1781.*”

Mr. Belsham entered upon his charge under considerable disadvantage; for though the qualifications of his predecessors might not have been inferior to his own, there had been that interruption of the usual business of the institution, owing to Mr. Robins's indisposition and loss of voice, and that relaxation of its discipline, which were very unfavourable to the habits of the students, and to the comfort and success of the presiding Tutor, adding greatly to the difficulties inseparable from the office of enforcing application, diligence, and exertion, and of restraining idleness and irregularity. But in this respect Mr. Belsham had an advantage in the dignity and authority of his manner, which no inmate of his family would attempt to disregard or dispute. His regularity and order in conducting the studies of his pupils did not admit of any negligence or inattention which was not perceived and properly exposed and censured, and his own habits concurred with his advice and admonitions to inspire them with a disposition to improve their ad-

vantages, and to acquit themselves with credit and respectability, both in the lecture-room and in the family; and it may be safely asserted, that there never was a period when there was so little to excuse or palliate; when the studies of the pupils were so well directed; when their application, diligence, and regularity were so great; when their attainments were so considerable, or when their general conduct was so exemplary and commendable. A stronger proof cannot be offered of the propriety and advantage of the method which Mr. Belsham adopted in the management of the institution, than the success which attended his plans and his exertions. The discipline which he maintained might be thought by some to be too strict and magisterial, but the effect was certainly beneficial. His behaviour to the students was reserved and distant, so as to wear the appearance of pride rather than dignity; and it was thought by many that he would have lost nothing of the respect and attachment of his pupils, if he had sometimes been more affable and familiar. But this reserve was certainly in a great measure assumed, and was exercised only towards those who were immediately under his superintendence, and while they continued members of his family. His temper, too, was warm and hasty, and he sometimes expressed himself in stronger terms than the occasion seemed to require or justify; but no one was ever less disposed to cherish resentment. When the relation of tutor and pupil no longer existed, he always treated those who had been under his care with that respect and affection which were due to their character and attainments.

No one could be more ready to think highly of both, or to make greater allowance for the inexperience of youth. No one could be more deeply interested in the respectability and opening prospects of his young friends, or had greater pleasure in the acceptance and usefulness of those who entered upon the important duties of the Christian ministry ; and no one could be more desirous of promoting their welfare and happiness. Perhaps there are few who have preserved such a fixed place in the regard, or rose higher in the increased respect and attachment of his pupils, when their growing experience and knowledge of the world better qualified them to judge of the conduct and ability of the tutor, than Mr. Belsham, or the memory of whom will be longer cherished with affection and gratitude by those who had the happiness to be placed under his tuition and watchful discipline.

When Mr. Belsham entered upon his office, the classes were unusually small ; but the number of students gradually increased as the reputation of the Academy extended under his auspices ; and that, not only without any diminution of the steadiness, order, and regularity which he had introduced and established, but with perceptible improvement in the character and disposition of those who were under his tuition ; which perhaps never stood higher than when that number was greatest, at the time of his resignation.

Owing to Mr. Belsham's removal, the business of the Academy at Daventry did not commence so early this session as usual. He entered on his *ministerial* duties in August, and in the month of

October, as noticed in his diary, a meeting of ministers was held to commend him and his labours to the Divine blessing. This service, highly proper in itself, and useful both to ministers and people, Mr. Belsham did not regard as less necessary, because he had but three years before been ordained as pastor of the congregation at Worcester. His notions of the nature of that ceremony were too rational and catholic to lead him to imagine that no further expression of dependence upon God, and accountableness to him, was necessary, when he connected himself with any other society ; and therefore, in the exercise of that piety for which he was so eminently distinguished, he was anxious to commit himself and the people of his charge to the direction and blessing of the Most High, and to seek his support and guidance amidst the arduous duties, and often perplexing trials, which they would have to meet. In this respect his example is well worthy the imitation of his brethren, especially of those who think that the concurrence of neighbouring ministers, and their advice, admonitions, and prayers, are expedient and advantageous when young ministers first enter on the important duties of their office ; for it can scarcely be imagined that the Divine blessing is less necessary because the pastor enters upon his office, when his experience is matured by time, when his talents are improved by cultivation, when his knowledge is enlarged by study and meditation, and when his qualifications are heightened by exercise ; for “ of him who has received much, much will be required ; ” and with this conviction,

a minister, of a serious and contemplative mind, will think it necessary, upon every such change of his relation and condition in life, to have the support and countenance of his brethren, and the benefit of their encouragement and prayers.

An outline of the general course of study pursued at Daventry is given by Mr. Belsham, in a letter addressed to Samuel Heywood, Esq., Harpur Street, London, upon an occasion which will hereafter be noticed ; and though deviations from this plan were occasionally made, as circumstances required, it was generally observed during Mr. Belsham's continuance at Daventry.

Mr. Belsham states, "The grand object which the patrons of this Academy have always had in view, has been the education of candidates for the Christian ministry among the Dissenters ; and the course of study has generally been conducted in such a manner as was thought to be best calculated for this important end. The usual period is five years, and the business proper to each year will appear in the following schedule :

" First Year.

"Short-hand, Classics, Hebrew ; by the Classical Tutor.

"Geography, Logic, Six books of Euclid ; by the Mathematical Tutor.

" Second Year.

"Classics and Hebrew, continued.

"The eleventh and twelfth books of Euclid, Algebra, Trigonometry.

"The doctrine of the Human Mind—the Divine

existence and attributes—the first principles of Ethics,—of Civil Government, and of the British Constitution ; by the presiding Tutor.

“ Third Year.

“ The Classics, and Hebrew, continued.

“ Conic Sections, Natural Philosophy, including Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Pneumatics, with the new discoveries upon Air, Optics, Astronomy, and Electricity.

“ Evidences of Revealed Religion, a comprehensive system of Ethics, connected with the discoveries and precepts of Revelation.

“ Fourth Year.

“ Conic Sections, and Natural Philosophy, continued.

“ Classics, Hebrew, Divinity, Ecclesiastical History ; by the presiding Tutor.

“ Fifth Year.

“ Critical Lectures on the New Testament, Jewish Antiquities, and Lectures on the Office of the Ministry.”

Mr. Belsham adds, “ Two or three orations are delivered every week by the students, and every gentleman intended for the learned professions takes his turn in these exercises, after having finished the first six months of his course. Every candidate for the ministry, from the commencement of his second year, takes his turn in prayer in the family in an evening ; and from the commencement of his third year, he takes his turn to pray in the

pulpit on the Lord's-day evening, previous to the delivery of the sermon.

“During the course, some convenient opportunity is taken to read a set of lectures against Popery, a few lectures upon Anatomy, and a short course upon Oratory. The senior students frequently shew up schemes of sermons to the Tutor for his correction, and the French language is taught to those who are desirous to learn it.

“Gentlemen of fortune, not intended for the ministry, usually continue three years, and are conducted through the course of lectures for the first three years : when they cannot spend so much time at the Academy, the course is proportionably contracted, and the less important parts are omitted.

“The library consists of about three thousand volumes. It is excellently well furnished in the department of Theology, and principally defective in Classics and the Belle Lettres. The philosophical apparatus is very complete in Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Pneumatics, Electricity, and the Arts ; its principal defects are in the Optical and Astronomical departments.”

The reader will be desirous of knowing the state of Mr. Belsham's mind and of his religious feelings during this period. It will be found that his sentiments remained unchanged, and that their influence continued to harass and distress his mind. His estimate of his own character is very different from the opinion formed of it by others, even by those who were most intimate with him, who knew him best, and who had the most frequent opportunities of witnessing his life and manners, and of

appreciating his abilities and services. But this circumstance merely shews how severely he judged himself; how much he was misled by the notions which he had imbibed of human depravity and guilt, and the proportion of it with which he himself was tainted, and how apt he was to consider every deviation from the standard of virtue which he had erected as a proof of his total failure in moral duty. The close observance of his conduct and disposition probably disposed him to think his failings and imperfections greater and more frequent than they really were; and as these occurred after repeated resolutions to avoid them, and with some expectation that it was possible to do so, to a greater extent than he found practicable, his disappointment, mortification, and self-reproach would be proportionably great.

“Lord’s-day evening, March 18th.—To-day I preached two new sermons on the danger of neglecting the Salvation of the Gospel. I have upon the whole spent the day more comfortably than I expected, considering that I was up till between two or three o’clock this morning, and was exceedingly late with my second sermon. My spirits have been good, and my heart has been rather enlarged than otherwise in devotion.

“In the review of the week, I condemn myself for not having visited my flock as I ought, and for my irregularity in exercises of devotion. I do not allow myself time for devotional intercourse with God, and it is but very seldom I can pray to him as I ought. My mind has upon the whole been tole-

rably easy, and I have sometimes entertained cheerful hope, in the midst of gloomy fears.”

“Lord’s-day evening, March 25th.—Though I began my sermon betimes on Friday, yet I could not finish two in time for the Lord’s-day. The morning sermon was the proof of the Divine existence from the phenomena of the world. It was the beginning of a course of sermons which I propose to give, as opportunity occurs, upon the evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion. I have been exceedingly dull through the whole day, and scarcely recollect any season in which I have been less affected, and in which the duties of religion have been less pleasant to me. I think I find in myself a more than common stupidity and hardness about religious concerns.”

“Lord’s-day evening, April 1.—I have been this day in an exceedingly comfortable frame. My morning meditations previous to public worship were extremely serious. At the Lord’s table I was peculiarly enlarged and devout. Upon the whole, I never remember a more delightful season than the whole of this morning’s service.—I was exceedingly affected at the recollection of the Saviour’s sufferings, and my spirits did not flag during the whole service. Were I to judge of myself by my frame, I could almost believe I had recovered that peace of mind, and that state of grace and favour with God, which I once possessed. But, alas ! I know myself too well to judge of the real state of my soul by the transient frame of my affections.—God grant the impressions I have received,

as well as those I have made, this day, may be lasting and efficacious! I was in a very serious frame in the afternoon and evening service; and altogether the public worship of the day has been edifying and delightful. O that I might never think or do any thing to throw a cloud upon my hopes and prospects!"

"Thursday, April 26.—I set apart two hours and a half for serious self-examination, thanksgiving, prayer, and self-dedication. It was my birthday. It was a very pleasing, instructive, and, I hope, useful exercise. I wish I had resolution to do it oftener; I should find my account in it. I recollected my sins, and confessed them with contrition. I renewed my self-dedication, and signed it with greater cheerfulness and inclination than I have done for many years. I begin to recover hope, and to enjoy some little spiritual comfort. God grant that nothing may interfere to overcast my prospects and to cloud my mind!

"Lord's-day evening, June 3.—I have been, upon the whole, rather in a dejected frame to-day, and I talked about the covenant of God, too much like one that has but little interest in it, or hope of it. I reflect upon myself for loss of time, for the prevalence of sin and folly in my heart, and for inattention to the duties of the ministerial office, particularly that of visiting the poorer members of the society."

"Lord's-day evening, June 10.—I have not been in a very comfortable frame to-day. My mind has been harassed and distressed both by the perplexity of my circumstances, and the conscious-

ness of my folly and guilt. I feel as though I were sometimes ready to abandon my hope. But I must not, I will not despair. He that has wrought out deliverance for his people can appear for me, and rescue me from the jaws of destruction.

“I went to Dudley Lecture the beginning of the week, and returned on Thursday. Received an application from Mr. Coward’s Trustees to succeed Mr. Robins, which has filled me with apprehension and perplexity.”

In contemplating the extracts from Mr. Belsham’s diary which close the year, and his review of this eventful period, the reader will perceive and admire the predominant wish of acting in that manner which duty prescribed, and his anxious concern to perceive and to follow the leadings of Divine Providence. His determination to accept the invitation of Mr. Coward’s Trustees was evidently the result of a conviction, that the office he was solicited to undertake was one which would afford the means of greater usefulness, though he could not anticipate, in the execution of his duty, that satisfaction and pleasure which he enjoyed in the more circumscribed and less arduous service of his congregation at Worcester; nor could he promise himself such improving and agreeable society as he found in that connexion. But when suitable arrangements were made, and the sense of his friends, and of those who were connected with the institution, was so strongly expressed that he was the fittest person to undertake the arduous task of presiding over the interests and conducting the business of the Academy, he cheerfully and immediately resolved to devote him-

self to this important object ; and it will be seen that he made every exertion to discharge his duty with ability and success, always referring himself and his exertions to the favour and blessing of the Being without whose assistance and guidance all human labour is fruitless and vain. It will also be seen that the distressing sense of his own weakness, imperfection, and guilt, still continued, and how it embittered that satisfaction which, he would otherwise have enjoyed, in the consciousness of his fidelity, perseverance, and successful exertion. But the expression of it was indeed disproportionate and excessive, as will appear from his own recorded opinion of the effect which the change of situation produced in his character and sentiments, and of the pleasure and advantage resulting from it, on a deliberate review, almost at the distance of twenty years :—April 26, 1806 : “ This period,” the time he resided at Daventry as Divinity Tutor, he observes, “ I call the beginning of the manhood of my existence. Before this ‘ I thought as a child, I understood as a child.’ I met with some trouble from the conduct of some of the young men, but upon the whole I was very happy with them, and the institution flourished beyond all former precedent. At one time there were fifty students.”

“ Lord’s-day evening, August 5th.—I was much affected in the morning service, and have seldom found myself more enlarged in the sacramental exercise, both in the discourse and in prayer. I pray God it may leave an abiding savour upon my heart.

“ This has been the most important week in my life. On Sunday I wrote from Bedford my answer

to Mr. Coward's Trustees, to express my acceptance of the charge of the Academy at Daventry ; and on Wednesday I gave in my answer to the congregation there. My mind is much discouraged, but I think I can truly say that I have acted from a sense of duty, and, whatever be the event, I shall be satisfied. I may have erred in my judgment, but I think, if I know my own heart, I have not erred in my will."

"Lord's-day evening, Oct. 14th.—In the morning I was much affected in private devotion towards the conclusion, in the view of my present situation as connected with the Academy. At family prayers I was serious; in the morning service very languid; in the afternoon and evening lively and affectionate, much more so than I expected; especially in the afternoon, for I began the service with great flatness and languor, but I was warmed as I advanced, and in the long prayer was very serious and comfortable. I baptized ——'s child this evening, and was not wholly unaffected in that service. It gave me great concern to see the thoughtless air with which it was attended by those who ought to have been most serious in it. My evening devotions short but serious. Upon the whole, the day has been a day of comfort and satisfaction. I was lamenting in the morning, that the return of the sabbath was not welcomed with more real pleasure. Thank God it has been a day of pleasure far beyond my expectation. I hope that an affecting sense of religious truths will long abide with me."

"Lord's-day evening, Oct. 21st.—The day has

upon the whole been tolerable. I have been more serious than affectionate; but in the long prayer, in the morning, I found myself a good deal affected. I felt some emotions of unbecoming vanity; and I am conscious of other dispositions, which I wish to suppress.

“On Thursday a meeting of ministers was held to ask the blessing of God upon my labours in this place. I was much affected with my private devotions in the morning before breakfast, and the service was upon the whole a very pleasing one.

“In the afternoon I was so much engaged with company, that I had no time for retirement. But I hope that God will hear the prayers that have been offered to him with seriousness and affection, and will command his blessing upon an undertaking in which I have engaged, I hope I can say, from a pure, disinterested regard to his honour and glory. For my own part, I am often discouraged; but sometimes I am cheerful; and the consciousness of the integrity of my heart, so far as this is concerned, and the hope of divine assistance, is my consolation and support. It is but a little while before I shall be set aside from my public work. I desire to be thankful that I am placed in a sphere of considerable usefulness while my ability for exertion is continued. I hope ‘I am willing to spend and be spent’ in so good a cause; and I wish that the zeal of my exertions may at least express the humble sense I have of past indolence, unworthiness, and misconduct.”

“Lord’s-day evening, Nov. 4th.—I renewed my self-dedication to God this evening with great

cheerfulness and comfort. Yesterday I read a devotional lecture to my young people ; the subject, ‘ Fulfil ye my joy.’ It was a pleasant service ; we were all much affected ; I hope improved.

“ The resolutions I formed in the presence of God this evening, and I hope with a proper sense of my own unworthiness and entire dependence upon Divine grace, were as follow : to guard against indolence, pride, self-conceit, and inattention in devotion—to be resolute in duty—to form schemes of business—to be more attentive in visiting my flock, and particularly to take a list of my congregation, and to visit them on Wednesdays and Fridays. I am too negligent in this duty. I am resolved to be more careful for time to come. But I need divine grace. ‘ Lord, help thou me.’ I need watchfulness and zeal. ‘ My soul cleaveth to the dust ; quicken thou me, according to thy word.’ O that I may feel more and more the constraining power of a Redeemer’s love, and may labour with growing zeal to promote his interest ! Amen.”

“ REVIEW OF THE YEAR 1781.

“ In respect to its events it has been one of the most important of my life. It has removed me from a situation, perhaps the most desirable among the Dissenters, to that which I at present occupy ; and I cannot but consider it as one of the greatest trials to which I have ever been exposed. I have quitted a scene in which I enjoyed the friendship of a most serious and affectionate people. I have removed to a situation, the duties of which I cannot discharge,

the temptations of which I cannot resist, and the trials of which I know not how to bear. My only consolation is, that I can truly say I did not take the step without serious deliberation, advice, and prayer ; and that my acceptance of this arduous and unhappy post was an error of judgment rather than of the heart.”

— “ At present every prospect before me looks dark and gloomy. I know not which way to turn, nor how to conduct myself. Yet I would not be forgetful of the mercies of the past year. Among these I include uninterrupted health, the continuance of all the comforts and conveniences of life, uncommon and unexpected kindness from my friends, preservation from danger, especially from falls from my horse. I have been thrown several times, but never received the least hurt. The posture of my temporal affairs would be considered by the world as upon the whole agreeable, and I am sure I have abundant reason to be thankful that I, who deserve no comforts, should be surrounded with so many at present, and should have prospects before me that, upon the whole, are so pleasing, that is, if I could but satisfy myself in respect to the propriety of continuing in this situation.

“ My religious privileges have been continued. I have not been detained one sabbath from the house of God ; and I have sometimes enjoyed what I could almost venture to call delightful intercourse with God. Some of my sacramental seasons have been exceedingly pleasant and delightful ; and when my heart has been almost rent asunder by agony

and distress, I have waited upon God, and found comfort and peace.

“ I have met with afflictions this year, which have pressed upon me. The death of my mother, which happened on the 21st of December, 1780, was a source of real and exquisite sorrow, at the beginning of this year. My removal from my affectionate Worcester friends has been as much as my spirits could bear.—The vexations and disappointments I have met with here, and especially in a few instances, in which I placed almost all my consolation, has been a source of unutterable grief. I am sometimes ready to think, that ‘ I am the man that hath seen affliction,’ and that no sorrow is like unto mine ; and yet all is too little to wean me from sin, and from the world, and to bring my heart to God.”

Mr. Belsham had not been long settled at Daventry before he felt the full weight of the charge which he had undertaken. The ability and knowledge which he possessed, his habits of application, his extensive reading, the regularity and method he observed in his own studies and in conducting those of his pupils, and the ease and clearness with which he was able to communicate his sentiments and observations, relieved him from all difficulty in the preparation of his lectures, and in the delivery of them ; but the internal management and discipline of the family, to one of his strong and very excitable feelings, was no easy task. Some irregularities, probably the result of the unsettled state of the Academy previously to his appointment to the

superintendence of it, occasioned him great uneasiness, and made him deeply regret that he had left a situation of comparative ease and enjoyment. Though this feeling was only casual or temporary, as appears from his reflections upon this period, (p. 231,) already given, yet it was serious and oppressive, and drew from him the expression of uneasiness and dissatisfaction, and excited a wish to be released from the responsibility to which he was subjected. Such an impression and feeling would scarcely be anticipated from one whose mind was naturally strong and active, whose resolution was firm and steady, and who might be expected to attribute such occasional interruptions of his comfort and satisfaction to the nature of the connexion in which he was placed, and to the thoughtlessness and precipitancy of young men, who had not acquired sufficient experience and self-command to guard against those offences which were so discreditable to themselves, and the source of so much uneasiness to their tutor, and to the friends of the institution.

About this time Mr. Coward's Trustees began to think the support of two Academies, Hoxton and Daventry, was attended with more expense than their funds would bear; and Dr. Kippis having resigned his office of Tutor of the Classics and Belles Lettres, and Dr. Savage, the Theological Tutor, having also signified his intention of retiring, it was generally understood that some arrangement would take place, which would consolidate the two institutions, either at Daventry or near London. It

was under this impression, when he was writing to Mr. Paice respecting the improper conduct of one of the young men for whom this gentleman was personally concerned, that Mr. Belsham took the opportunity of expressing himself in the following manner:

“ Permit me to add, that I feel from the experience of this session (May 24th, 1782),* that I have imprudently taken upon myself a burden too heavy for me to bear. As the time now approaches when Dr. Savage means to resign his office in the Academy at Hoxton, I presume it is not improbable, from some circumstances which have been pretty publicly talked of, that some alteration may be made in the plan of the Academies. If some arrangement, either of union or disunion, might be made in which my name might be left out, and I might be permitted to return to that station of humble and contented privacy from which I have so unadvisedly emerged, I should esteem it the greatest favour which could be conferred upon me by the gentlemen of the trust.”

Without questioning the sincerity with which Mr. Belsham made this declaration at the moment,

* It may be supposed that there is some mistake in the date of this letter, though it appears in connexion with others from which and other circumstances, it may be inferred, that it was written at the time specified. The institution at Hoxton was not dissolved till the close of the Midsummer session, 1785. During the previous year, the present writer was a student at this Academy, then, as it had long been, under the superintendence of Dr. Rees. During that period Dr. Savage continued in office, and divided with Dr. Rees the business of the Classical Tutor. Dr. Kippis's resignation had taken place the preceding year. It is not improbable that both these gentlemen had signified their intentions before this time, and had been prevailed on to continue their services to the period above-mentioned.

it may be doubted whether he would have deliberately resigned a situation which was so honourable to himself, which presented a field of such extensive usefulness, and in which he exerted himself so much to the satisfaction of those who were most intimately connected with the institution, and of those who derived the greatest advantage from it. Arduous and painful as his office might sometimes be, a sense of duty would have been paramount to any temporary feeling, and he would have continued to exercise his talents, and to pursue the important objects which he had constantly before him, with the fortitude and resolution, as well as with the ardour and zeal which the accomplishment of them demanded. He would have considered himself as giving way to a culpable selfishness, if he had allowed any regard to his own ease and tranquillity to have interfered with those labours by which so many young persons were to be trained to habits of diligent study and investigation, qualified for important stations in society, and many of them fitted for the arduous office of the Christian ministry.

Mr. Belsham continues, "It is with real concern I hear that Mr. Farmer has resigned his place in Mr. Coward's trust; but I learn with great pleasure that Dr. Harris is chosen to succeed him. I beg leave to congratulate the trust on the appointment of an associate so well disposed and so ably qualified to co-operate in every scheme which may appear conducive to the prosperity of the Academy, and to the interests of truth and virtue. May I beg the favour of you, Sir, to make my proper compliments to the Doctor upon the occasion? Mr.

Robins unites with me in respectful compliments. He is quite well, excepting his voice."

Whatever disappointment or mortification Mr. Belsham might feel in the exercise of his office, it is evident that his efforts to establish order and regularity in the Academy, and to excite the students to application, diligence, and consistency of conduct, were attended with the desired effect. The reputation of the institution soon rose as high as it had ever been at any period, under the auspices of his predecessors. One of his early pupils, in a letter to the present writer, describing the state of the Academy at the time when Mr. Belsham was appointed to the superintendence of it, observes, "In consequence of Mr. Robins's long indisposition, and the want of firmness which had always been manifested in his system of government, great irregularities had prevailed, and our friend had an arduous task to accomplish, but he performed that task in an effectual manner; and might have said, with the Roman emperor (Augustus), *'ut jure sit gloriatus, marmoream se relinquere, quam lateritiam accepisset'* (Suetonius, cap. xxviii.) — that he could justly boast, that whereas he had found the city brick, he had left it marble."

The following is another honourable testimony to Mr. Belsham's judicious and successful discipline:

"I rejoice to hear from various quarters of the excellent order and prosperity of that college which I delight to call Alma Mater; and I hope such order and such prosperity will long continue to smooth your labours, lighten your burden, animate your hopes, and give you perfect satisfaction, even in the

sacrifice you made at Worcester. You are now supporting the fountain which may feed a thousand streams. Worcester was but one of those streams. Your letter to the Board, read some time ago, gave great pleasure to every member, to me more particularly, as being more interested in two of your pupils."

The letter addressed to Mr. Heywood, from which the scheme of studies pursued at Daventry was taken, (p. 224,) was written in compliance with the wish of some gentlemen, "friends of the Warrington Academy," whom Mr. Belsham had met at Mr. Heywood's house, and who had made some proposal to unite the two institutions. After stating that he had made some inquiry for a house suitable to the accomplishment of their purpose, and that such a one was attainable, Mr. Belsham says, in concluding, "I have nothing further to add, but my earnest wishes and prayers, that those gentlemen who are touched with so generous a concern for the establishment of an institution for the virtuous and liberal education of studious youth, may be directed to the best means of accomplishing their important and benevolent design. How far the proposed coalition may be conducive to this end, I leave to be decided by those respectable gentlemen, on both sides, to whose province this question more particularly belongs, and who, I am confident, have the same great object equally at heart. In the mean time, I wait with anxious expectation the result of their deliberation, and shall be happy to concur to the utmost of my humble ability in any scheme which may have a tendency to advance the inte-

rests of useful learning, and genuine religion and virtue.”

This object was evidently so far pursued, that some overtures were made to Mr. Coward’s Trustees; but upon what plan it was proposed to unite these institutions does not appear, nor is it important, as the design was not carried into execution. The following letter shews that it had been seriously entertained:

BENJAMIN VAUGHAN, Esq., to the Rev. T.
BELSHAM.

“*London, Sept. 5, 1783.*

“DEAR SIR,

“By the same post that brought me your favour of August 29th, I received a letter from Dr. Enfield, informing me that the Warrington institution was closed. Our scheme, therefore, unhappily falls to the ground on all sides.

“I will not pay you so ill a compliment as to suppose the Daventry trustees had any diffidence as to what might have been your conduct over the joint seminary. They are elderly people, attached to forms, and fearful of the gaiety of young men. I think their fears more natural than wise.

“Your zeal is very pleasing to me, because I feel the same in the same cause; and I will not despair of the day arriving, when our mutual wish shall in one way or other be gratified. Requesting the favour of your visits when you again come to London, I remain, with much regard, dear Sir,

“Your most obedient, humble servant,

“BENJAMIN VAUGHAN.”

The observations and reflections which Mr. Belsham's diary exhibits during this period are so similar, both in expression and sentiment, to those which have been already given, that it is unnecessary to introduce any particular extracts from them. His occupations were so uniform, and his situation and circumstances so little varied, as scarcely to afford occasion for any new or striking remark. His religious opinions appear to have remained unchanged, which is not extraordinary, considering how deeply they were infixed in his mind, and how little the mode of discussing points of theology, in the lectures read at Daventry, was calculated to promote inquiry, or to excite any suspicion of the truth of those doctrines which had usually been inculcated. They who are acquainted with the course drawn up by Dr. Doddridge, which continued to be the text-book of the students in divinity, will not be surprised that the same sentiments were maintained by the tutor, and, with trifling variation, adopted by the pupils. In this work the doctrine to be discussed is generally stated as a proposition, to which a problem or demonstration is added, as though it admitted of proof as definite and convincing as that which supports a mathematical theorem. Scholia and corollaries are usually added, as observations and inferences, so that the young student is taught to consider the proposition as fully established, and the deduction drawn from it as conclusive and irrefragable. The only way in which he would be led to entertain any doubt, or to adopt a different conclusion, is by the perusal of the references to the various authors who have dis-

cussed the subject, which are usually given in the course of the lecture, or at the conclusion of it; and to these, additions have been made in the latest editions of this celebrated work, with considerable fairness and impartiality. An inquisitive and ingenuous mind would not in some cases implicitly adopt the theory of the text-book, nor always admit the evidence by which it was supposed to be supported. It was not till Mr. Belsham adopted a different method of investigating the doctrines of religion, that he was apprehensive of the insecurity of the foundation of many of those which he thought scriptural.

The following letter is important, as it exhibits Mr. Belsham's sentiments upon some doctrinal points of religion, and shews how far they were at this time removed from those opinions which he afterwards adopted.

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. S. PALMER.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“We are much obliged by your collection of prayers. I have read some of them, and think they are well calculated for the purpose intended. I shall put them into the library, close to Dr. Priestley's Unitarian Liturgy, that one may serve as an antidote for the other.—Apropos, have you seen the Doctor's answer to Horsley? It is masterly; and though I do not think he proves the primitive church Socinian, it appears undoubtedly Unitarian. Indeed, brother Palmer, your Indwelling scheme will not hold. It is a mere modern invention, that solves no difficulty; and, in my humble opinion,

amounts to nothing at all. True and undefiled orthodoxy is this: that the Father is the one only self-existent God; that the Son is an eternal, necessary emanation from him, and in all respects of the same nature with him, and equal to him; and, lastly, that the Holy Spirit necessarily proceeded both from the Father and the Son, distinct from both and equal to them. No man, who does not firmly and indubitably believe all these things, has any right to the name of Orthodox, or any title to Athanasian salvation. As to the Indwelling scheme, I own it appears to me, the more I consider it, to be nothing, or the grossest absurdity.—If it means nothing more than a consent of purpose, will, and power, and that the works of the Son are performed by the concurrent operation of the Father, every Socinian believes as much. This scheme, therefore, is nothing.—If it means, that the Father, a conscious, intelligent agent, is so united to the Son, another conscious, intelligent agent, as to produce a third compound being, distinct from both the Father and the Son, this I say is as incomprehensible as any thing in the Athanasian creed, and is an hypothesis neither founded on scripture nor supported by the Fathers. The more I consider the subject, the more clearly does it appear to me, that Dr. Clarke's hypothesis approaches nearest to the standard of truth, and the opinion of the earliest Fathers. I have studied Socinianism much of late, and have endeavoured to divest myself as much as possible of all prejudice; but though I acknowledge it has a great deal more to say for itself than I once thought it had, yet upon the most im-

partial and deliberate examination, it appears to me to deviate very far from the true doctrine of Scripture. While the first chapter of John and the first chapter of Colossians make a part of the Scriptures, so long will the pre-existence of Christ, in my apprehension, make a glorious part of the doctrine of the New Testament.

“I have lately been reading lectures on the doctrine of the Atonement. This doctrine has, you know, been warmly attacked in Dr. Priestley’s History of the Corruptions of Christianity. I was determined, therefore, that my class and I should examine it thoroughly for ourselves. I made them all search the New Testament through, and write down every text in which the death of Christ is mentioned or alluded to. These texts, which are in number about two hundred and forty, we have digested under various heads, something similar to Dr. Clarke’s Account of the Scripture Trinity, and by this means I have attained greater satisfaction upon that important subject than ever I did before. I observed, also, that my young people were much pleased with this method of studying the subject, which teaches them to inquire and search into the Scriptures for themselves; and I believe I shall adopt it with regard to some other points of the greatest importance in divinity. One circumstance I was greatly struck with in this collection and comparison of the texts upon the subject of the death of Christ; i. e. how very few passages of Scripture there are which lead us to consider the death of the Son of God under the notion of an attestation to the truth, and as an example of suffer-

ing virtue, in comparison with those which represent it as a ransom, or propitiation, and a sin-offering. And so long as the Epistle to the Romans and that to the Hebrews stand as a part of my Bible, so long I must take the liberty to differ from Dr. Priestley upon this subject.

“ Our family this session has been numerous—upon the whole, well behaved. Some follies there have been, but nothing criminal that I am acquainted with.—But young men will be young men, and my spirits are sometimes too much hurt by their imprudences.—I am not happy here, and I am beginning to fear I never shall. I wish for nothing so ardently as some honourable mode of retreat.—In the mean time, I wish faithfully and diligently, to the utmost of my slender ability, to discharge the duties of my trust. But the burden presses heavy upon me. I hope my friends are kind enough to remember me now and then in their retired moments.—Yours affectionately,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, Dec. 24, 1783.*”

In a subsequent letter, dated April 3rd, 1784, in reply to one from Mr. Palmer, Mr. Belsham says, “ You have stated some hints in your letter upon the subject of orthodoxy, which I should not be sorry to discuss with you, *vivâ voce*. I still hold to my text, that the only true orthodox Athanasian hypothesis is that of the eternal, necessary generation of the Son from the substance of the Father, and the Son being in all respects equal to him. The doctrine of three distinct, independent, self-existent beings, I believe you will find maintained by

very few. You have fallen into the same error respecting Dr. Waterland's sentiments which Dr. Priestley has done, and I presume from the same cause, i. e. by trusting to Dr. Doddridge's representation of his sentiments, in his lectures.—I have convinced Dr. Priestley of his mistake, and when I see you here I will convince you, that Dr. Waterland's notion of the Son was that of necessary derivation from the substance of the Father, and that in this respect his sentiments coincide with those of Horsley, Bishop Bull, and the rest of the Athanasians. This is not the only instance in which Dr. Doddridge, through hurry and inattention, has been guilty of misrepresenting the sentiments of the authors to which he refers. There is a most notorious instance of the same kind in regard to Dr. Ridgley, upon the subject of Original Sin, where he has assigned an exceedingly absurd opinion to the Doctor, who utterly disowns it, and represents it as a gross popish absurdity. I begin to see, brother Palmer, that we cannot be too wary in taking up opinions from the representation of others ; and I am persuaded that when we wish for satisfaction, it is the best way, in all cases of consequence, to have recourse to the original authors.

“ Will you give me credit when I tell you there are a great many good things in Dr. Fisher's* sermon ? It was much beyond my expectation.—It is true my expectations were low ; but the subject was, I believe, more agreeable to my sentiments than to yours. Predestination is a doctrine upon which I look with a favourable eye ; and, in short, I really deserve more credit for my orthodoxy than

* Dr. Fisher was at this time Divinity Tutor at Homerton Academy.

people are willing to allow. My case is certainly a very hard one. I really approach nearer to orthodoxy than any one of my predecessors, without excepting Dr. Doddridge himself; and yet, such is my misfortune, that, as the Reviewers express it, ‘I can never come in for a share of the orthodox plum cake.’ However, I must make myself as contented as I can without it. If I know my own heart, there is nothing I more ardently pant after than truth; and whatever appears to be important truth, I hope I never would be afraid or ashamed to avow, whatever the consequences might be.”

The year 1785 was an eventful period in Mr. Belsham’s life, and it will be seen with what anxieties the occurrences of it filled his mind, and how disinterestedly as well as judiciously he conducted himself in circumstances of no trifling perplexity and difficulty.

Dr. Kippis having resigned his connexion with the Hoxton Academy, which, as well as that at Daventry, was chiefly supported by Mr. Coward’s Trustees; and Dr. Savage having signified his intention to vacate the Theological chair, a considerable difficulty was found to supply the places of these eminent men. Some other reasons induced the gentlemen presiding over these institutions to contemplate the union and consolidation of the two. To accomplish this purpose, it was proposed entirely to shut up the Academy at Hoxton, and to transfer the students who had not finished their course of education at that seminary, to Daventry. This appeared to many a very exceptionable plan, and was far from being agreeable

to the students. It was thought that it would be a serious injury to the Dissenting interest in and near the metropolis, as it would deprive the congregations of those supplies which had been drawn from this source, and reduce them to the necessity of applying to other seminaries, and oblige them to invite and accept ministers whose course of education and whose attainments were very different from what they could altogether approve. It was also imagined that the advantage which resulted from a liberal and becoming rivalry in these institutions would be lost; that the Academy at Daventry itself might not be so prosperous and useful as it had been, or as it would be if both were supported and encouraged; that the difficulty of obtaining the services of tutors of distinguished eminence and of suitable qualifications would be much greater in the country than in or near London; and that the change which must take place in the plan and constitution of the Academy at Daventry to admit of such a union, would be great and hazardous. The institution at Hoxton had for some time laboured under the disadvantage of having no Tutor in the place of Dr. Kippis; but the business had been conducted with great ability and effect by the joint efforts of Dr. Savage and Dr. Rees; and the number and character of the students made it highly desirable that this institution should be supported. The advanced period of life which Dr. Savage had attained, determined him in his purpose of resigning his office, and increased the difficulty which the Trustees had to surmount in supplying Hoxton with suitable Tutors. But

though this object might have been accomplished, yet from motives of economy, or for other reasons which appeared to them sufficient to justify the determination, they resolved upon concentrating the institutions and devoting their entire support to that at Daventry.

The first object of Mr. Coward's Trustees was, to induce Mr. Belsham to adopt their views, and to continue the superintendence of the Academy with the additional charge to be committed to his trust. Had Mr. Belsham declined the engagement, it may safely be asserted the plan of the Trustees could not have been accomplished. It was scarcely possible that they should have found any other person who could have supported the credit of the institution with equal ability and success, in the unfavourable circumstances in which it was to be attempted. The reader has already been apprized of the manner in which the assistant Tutors were appointed, and must be fully aware of the defective constitution of the Academy in this particular. The office was never made of sufficient importance to insure the services of persons of eminent ability and attainments, or the continuance of them for a sufficient period to secure the full advantage of their knowledge and experience. Their influence was circumscribed, their duties were arduous, and the remuneration was altogether mean and inadequate. Whenever, therefore, the prospect of a suitable settlement presented itself in any other situation, it was too much to expect that men of talent and information would sacrifice their imme-

diate interest to that of the institution, in which they held such a subordinate station, and had neither the authority nor independence essential to the dignified and effective discharge of its duties. Upon the union of the Academies, the difficulties and disadvantages of the plan, as well as the duties and exertions of the superintending Tutor, would be greatly increased, and the probability of success would become more doubtful and discouraging. It is only surprising that Mr. Belsham could have been induced to make the experiment, and to submit to the terms and conditions proposed ; nor is it too much to assert, that nothing but a paramount sense of duty, and a disinterested desire of co-operating with the Trustees in maintaining the reputation and usefulness of the Academy, could have influenced his determination.

It is a curious fact, that at this period the Trustees of the Warrington Academy were making every possible effort to revive that establishment. They were desirous to place the institution upon a respectable and secure foundation, and the peculiar circumstances of the Dissenting interest rendered the accomplishment of such a purpose highly desirable. For many years the Academy at Warrington had been liberally supported, and had been found eminently useful in supplying the congregations of Dissenters in the northern counties with suitable ministers, and also in affording the youth of Dissenting families an opportunity of pursuing their studies so as to fit themselves for stations of importance of a professional or secular nature.

From circumstances which it is not necessary to detail, but which had not been unforeseen,* the interests of this institution had rapidly declined, and its friends were unable to secure the continuance of those advantages which had been derived from it. But there were many who thought that a successful appeal might be made to the Dissenting public, that this was the proper time for such an effort, and that the Academy might be re-established upon a plan that would ensure its support and prosperity. A primary step in the execution of this scheme was to secure the superintendence of a Tutor, whose character and qualifications would justify the confidence of its patrons, and render probable the accomplishment of their wishes. Their views were immediately directed to Mr. Belsham, not with any intention of uniting Daven-try and Warrington, as Mr. Belsham at first imagined, but with the view of establishing the Warrington Academy upon a scale that would do credit to the liberality of the Dissenters, and furnish their religious societies with ministers of learning, ability, and attainments, corresponding with the improved state of the religious public, and the increased knowledge, taste, and information, which were beginning to be diffused among all classes of men. It will shortly be seen in what manner Mr. Belsham received the application from this quarter, and by what honourable and liberal principles he was actuated in these extraordinary circumstances.

Mr. Belsham considered it as his first duty to

* See the Life of Gilbert Wakefield, Vol. I. p. 215.

attend to the proposals and suggestions of Mr. Coward's Trustees.

In an official letter before the writer of these Memoirs, dated May 18th, 1785, it is stated, on the motion of Dr. Harris,

“ That the Trust has a full conviction of the learning, abilities, and fidelity of the Rev. Mr. Belsham as their Tutor at Daventry, and that they are perfectly satisfied with the prudence he has manifested in the discipline and government of the family.

“ That whatever be the issue of the consolidating plan, Mr. Belsham merits every encouragement and support within our power, consistent with the grand object of the charity for which we are appointed Trustees.

“ That the thanks of this Trust be given to Mr. Belsham for his very able and faithful services, and that he be desired to repose an entire confidence in our friendship, which cannot fail to have a most essential influence on the grand object and end of our mutual labours.

“ That Mr. Belsham be invited to meet as many of the Trustees as may be able to undertake the journey, on Wednesday evening, the 25th inst., at Dunstable, to enter more particularly into the business of the consolidation of the Academies.”

At this meeting the plan of uniting the institutions was more fully explained, and the terms specifically proposed. It appears that previously to this time Mr. Belsham had admitted young gentlemen into his family as parlour boarders, having some privileges in the choice of rooms, and a separate table, a distinction between them and the other

students which the Trustees considered as disadvantageous to the establishment, and which they wished to abolish. Mr. Belsham could not immediately comply with this proposal, and the business seems to have been partly compromised, for Mr. Belsham continued to receive gentlemen as lay-students, upon advanced terms, who breakfasted and supped in the parlour, and some of the best rooms were reserved for their accommodation, though in other respects they were on an equality with the divinity students, and no jealousy or inconvenience arose from this arrangement. The commons and domestic arrangement of the family were such as could not fail to be satisfactory to all.

There were many circumstances connected with the proposed union of the Academies, which must have been difficult and embarrassing to Mr. Belsham ; and that he was much perplexed and agitated by them, is evident from the following letters :

The Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM to the Rev. Dr. R.
HARRIS.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ At the time I left Dunstable, my feelings, which you well know I cannot always command as I would, and which are by much too strong for my own comfort in this rough world, were in such a state as to render it very improper for me to form a decisive judgment upon the important subject proposed to my consideration, and might probably have led me to a determination which a cooler hour would have disapproved. I am obliged to the gentlemen for the indulgence they allowed me of deli-

berating upon the business, and as I am fully apprized of the material inconvenience which will accrue from keeping the affair longer in suspense, as soon as I had made up my mind upon the subject I thought it necessary to acquaint them with it ; and I have taken the liberty of addressing myself to you, Sir, upon the occasion, as I know that there are some important steps which you will think it advisable to take immediately, in consequence of the intelligence which you receive.

“ In the first place, Sir, I request you to acquaint the gentlemen of Mr. Coward’s Trust, that I am much obliged by the attention which they have been pleased to pay to the plan which I took the liberty of submitting to their consideration, and for all the concessions they have made in correspondence with my ideas. As to the circumstance of independent students supping in the parlour, my principal motive for desiring it was to facilitate the discipline of the house ; but upon this subject I submit to the judgment of wiser men, and I willingly, though not without some apprehension as to the consequences, give up the point ; and if the two Academies are to be consolidated, I accept, though with unfeigned diffidence and reluctance, the honourable but very arduous office to which I am invited by Mr. Coward’s Trustees, of standing at the head of the united institutions. Yet even now, if it would not appear like officiously intruding into an affair out of my province, I would express my earnest wish that the resolution of uniting the Academies might be revised. The interests of the most respectable congregations in the vicinity of the metropolis, and the

peculiar advantage which must necessarily accrue to the Dissenting interest at large, from the greater number of tutors and pupils, and from the friendly emulation of the sister seminary, all seem to me to plead strongly for the interest of both. There may be greater objections against the plan than I am aware of; but of these I am sensible Mr. Cōward's Trustees are the only competent judges, nor are they obliged to publish their reasons to the world. I am fully convinced of the excellence of their motives, nor do I think my ignorance of their reasons, nor even a difference of opinion upon this subject, a sufficient objection against undertaking the charge of the consolidated institutions.

“I flatter myself, that the gentlemen of the Trust will not urge me to do any thing unhandsome to my present parlour boarders; and I hope that the gentlemen from Hoxton will waive their objections when they find that every distinction of this sort will cease, when the present generation has left us.

“I cannot but wish that the senior students at Hoxton might finish their course in London, which was, I think, hinted at Dunstable; for I much fear that they will not be able to reconcile their minds to Daventry.

“I have assumed a very honourable and a very important office, from motives which I trust I need not be ashamed to avow. I am too conscious of my own inability to discharge the proper duties of this high office as they ought to be performed, to be very ambitious of it, or unwilling at any time to resign it, when a better plan can be adopted, in which my service will be unnecessary. In the

mean time it is my purpose to exert my best ability, with resolution and zeal, and as much cheerfulness as I can summon, to discharge the duties of my office in such a manner as may answer the important ends proposed by the gentlemen who have called me to it, and to *merit* at least, though I may not hope in every instance to attain, the respect, affection, and gratitude of my pupils ; and I persuade myself that the gentlemen who have assigned to me this difficult task, will in every emergency assist me with their advice and support, and that they will daily recommend my imperfect services to Him whose blessing can ensure success, even to the feeblest instrument that he condescends to employ in promoting his own cause in the world.

“ Yours, &c.,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, May 28th, 1785.*”

The Rev. R. HARRIS, D. D., to the Rev.

THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ DEAR SIR, *London, June 1, 1785.*

“ On my return from Clapham last evening, I received your letter of the 28th ult., which gave me more satisfaction than I choose to express. The emotions of your mind at Dunstable I observed, though I took no notice of them to you. I felt with you and for you, and saw all your embarrassments in all their power and extent. I, therefore, most heartily concurred with my brethren in granting you further time for deliberation. It gives me pleasure that the effect is so conformable to our wishes.

“ We have talked over so often and so fully the subject of equal commons among the students, that nothing more, perhaps, can be suggested, and as we are at last agreed, we will leave the fitness of it to time and experience.

“ What you observe concerning the consolidation of the two institutions, does you credit, and though your arguments have occurred to us, and have been weighed with much care and scrupulosity, yet I doubt not but the Trust, at your desire, will revise their former opinion. For, as you will recollect, Sir, we told you at our first visit, we came to Daventry, not with *absolute* resolutions, but to consult Mr. Belsham as a prudent and experienced Tutor, from whom we might learn knowledge and discretion.

“ The greatest obstacle in our way to a present settlement is, what we talked over at Dunstable, and which you mention in your letter, viz. the disposal of your present parlour boarders. I feel as you do. The business has occupied my thoughts ever since. And if any plan can be contrived to finish the course of the senior Hoxton students without sending them to Daventry, I shall greatly rejoice, as it will entirely prevent the consequence you seem to dread, and, I think, not without reason. And if this can be effected, it may perhaps render it unnecessary to take a new house, as no new students are offered for Hoxton. But from your knowledge and experience of the world, you must have full conviction that no man, nor any set of men, be his or their wisdom, power, and affluence, what they may, can attain the accomplishment of all their schemes and

desires in this mutable, imperfect state. We have abundant means for the object we have in view ; and we expend upon that object more than double the sum we are obliged to expend upon it, and yet we cannot attain the extent of our wishes.

“ You will observe that I write all this from myself. I have not seen any gentlemen of the Trust. I know not that I can see them in the course of the week. I shall, however, send your letter immediately to Mr. Tayler and Mr. Paice : and I have proposed a meeting on Friday or Saturday. In all events, be assured that you are in full possession of the esteem of the Trust ; and that no advice and support in our power shall be wanting to promote your comfort and usefulness, provided you honour us with an open and manly confidence, without distrust or reserve. You have already, in the most essential points, known our sentiments of your qualification for the office to which an All-wise Providence has called you. I have only to add my unfeigned prayers, that God may continue your health, prosper your labours, vouchsafe you every divine support and consolation, and make you and your family happy in time and eternity.

“ I am, with the greatest regard, your affectionate friend and humble servant,

“ R. HARRIS.

“ P. S. I intended to send this according to the date, but on second thoughts I deferred it, until I saw the other Trustees. We met this day. They approve the contents, and are highly pleased with your letter.”

Mr. Belsham had never been satisfied with the situation of the Academy at Daventry. He well knew the disadvantages which were imposed upon the students in so small a town, and it was his earnest wish to prevail upon Mr. Coward's Trustees to remove the institution to a place of more importance, in which the young men would have access to better society and other means of improvement. Northampton was considered as an eligible situation, and some inquiry had been made for a house sufficiently commodious for the purpose, but not with much success, and this was one cause that the plan was not encouraged and adopted by the Trustees.

While this business was in agitation, an application was made to Mr. Belsham to undertake the superintendence of the Academy at Warrington. This was done by a communication from the Rev. J. Yates, which has not been preserved; but the following extract from a letter of that gentleman's, dated June 7th, 1785, shews that the nature of the proposal had been misunderstood by Mr. Belsham, and probably the proposal itself had on that account been discouraged :

“ Though it is vain to wish that any past event had been different from what it was, I cannot help greatly lamenting the intelligence you give me ; for I fear you will find the truth of what I before intimated to you, that the very existence of the Warrington Academy depended upon you.

“ I suppose, in one part of my last letter, I expressed myself inaccurately, for I had no wish of uniting Daventry and Warrington. I should have

been glad if you and Mr. Coward's Trustees had thought it would be for the interest of the Dissenters at large, if you had conducted the Warrington Academy, and some other person been chosen for Daventry. This important subject has induced me to beg more of your time than your employments can easily spare; but I fear I shall seldom have occasion to write to you again upon this subject."

A very short time elapsed before it was resumed. The correspondence, though extended, will not be uninteresting. The reader will probably think that Mr. Belsham does not appear in it with his usual advantage, and it may be allowed, that his attachment to the scene of his long and useful labours, his respect for the gentlemen of Mr. Coward's Trust, and his wish, to the utmost of his ability, to support their plans as far as his own sense of their propriety and usefulness would allow, so much influenced his deliberations as to give an appearance of indecision and inconsistency to his conduct, especially as he himself admits, that the Trustees were not disposed to adopt his views, nor to make those concessions which he had some right to expect. Much allowance must be made for the influence of habit and association, as Mr. Belsham justly pleads; and the perplexity and difficulty of the circumstances in which he was placed afford some apology for the want of firmness and resolution.

In the mean time a circumstance occurred which tended to facilitate the removal of the institution from Daventry to Northampton. In consequence of the death of the Rev. Thomas Porter, the congregation made application to Mr. Belsham to be

their minister. This invitation must have been very acceptable to Mr. Belsham, as it would be an additional reason for removing the Academy, and facilitate this important measure. In making the communication to Mr. Coward's Trustees, he enters fully into the consideration of the question of removal, which had been discussed in the interview he had with them at Dunstable. The reasons which he urged for this measure were so forcible, and the objections to the plan were apparently so satisfactorily removed, that it is only surprising they had not more weight in bending the resolution of the Trustees to this point. It appears that a house suitable for the accommodation of the Tutor might then have been purchased, with adjoining land for building such an addition as would admit thirty students, or more if necessary. The difference of expense in accomplishing this plan, or of making the proposed alterations at Daventry, would not have been more than five hundred pounds. But a reluctance to expend such a sum, which must have been obtained by a loan, though the debt would very shortly have been liquidated by the annual surplus funds of the Trust, determined the Trustees to relinquish the advantages which would have been secured by it; and thus the opportunity was lost of establishing the institution upon a scale that would have done honour to the Dissenters and to the Trustees of Mr. Coward's fund, and greatly promoted the interests of the Dissenting public.

The report of this invitation to Mr. Belsham from Northampton, excited great alarm in the congregation at Daventry, and proposals of accom-

modation for the continuance of the Academy in that town were made from various quarters. The fears of the congregation were allayed, and the further expression of them for a time deferred, by the judicious interference and advice of Mr. Robins, who was able to assure them that there was no reason to suppose Mr. Belsham would resign his situation for the following year, either as Tutor of the Academy, or as minister of the congregation.

Whilst these deliberations were pending, the views of the Trustees of Warrington Academy were again directed to Mr. Belsham, of which intimation is given in the following letter, supported by the strong and impressive arguments of Mr. Yates, (though professedly withheld,) to comply with the intended application from the friends of the institution :

“Everton, July 2, 1785.

“DEAR SIR,

“I fully expected that my last letter would have closed our correspondence on the subject on which I have so often troubled you ; but my reason for taking the pen once more is, to prevent you from being surprised if you should receive an invitation from Warrington, notwithstanding they have no reason given them to hope for your acceptance of it. On Thursday there was a meeting of the Trustees of the Academy, at which, though it was determined to revive the institution, no person could be thought of as proper to fill the Divinity chair but yourself ; and though it was known that

you had said you would not listen to an invitation from the Trustees of the Academy, and the members of the congregation, yet the anxiety of their desire to prevail, and their presumption that the situation at Warrington would be so much more useful than any other which they are acquainted with, seemed to draw back every mind from thinking of any other person, and the meeting was broken up.

“ When the congregation heard of the debates of the day, the principal members of it, though it was impossible for them to be more solicitous about you than the Trustees of the Academy are, came to a resolution to be more determinate, and shewed their eager desire by hoping against hope.

“ I have stated this affair to you, not in order to trouble you with any importunate arguments, but to shew that I have really been more passive than active in it ; yet I cannot help saying that even if I was unconcerned about the Academy, and was influenced only by friendship for you, I should regret your resolution to continue at Daventry, because I am persuaded your removal to Warrington would be productive of your happiness.

“ It is scarcely possible, with the sentiments you have, that Mr. Coward’s Trustees and the Daventry congregation will accord with you,* and it is to be

* It does not appear to what sentiments of Mr. Belsham, Mr. Yates here refers. It must have been the state of his mind, or some opinions developed in the discussion of religious subjects, that gave Mr. Yates reason to apprehend a change in Mr. Belsham’s views upon some points of doctrine ; a change not generally known, and perhaps not even suspected by Mr. Belsham himself, but which was sufficiently obvious to his friend, earnestly watching the import of every expression, anticipating the result of those inquiries and investi-

feared that their desire of your continuance arises, not so much from an approbation of your spirited conduct, (which they have themselves told you they wished otherwise,) as from a conviction that you are almost necessary to them. Whereas you will be invited to Warrington by every heart, and find every man rejoicing in his connexion with you, and encouraging and forwarding every scheme for your increasing usefulness.

“I cannot but consider the office of Divinity Tutor and Minister at Warrington to be the most honourable and advantageous in England, because there is no other person connected with so many independent and liberal men, nor having such unbounded scope for usefulness. It would be every thing which this kingdom wants in a seminary of education. But I despair of every thing without you.—Adieu. Yours respectfully,

“J. YATES.”

The invitation from the congregation at Warrington was sent without delay, and Mr. Belsham was so far inclined to listen to the proposal as to request time for consideration, and for ascertaining how far Mr. Coward's Trustees were disposed to adopt the plans which he recommended, considering himself bound to them in the execution of such measures as admitted of his retaining his situation at the head of their Academy with honour to himself and

gations in which Mr. Belsham was so deeply interested, and ardently desirous to obtain his services in conducting an institution which had been distinguished for the support of liberal sentiments upon all subjects of religion and morality.

the prospect of usefulness in it. His sentiments and intentions were communicated to his friend with his usual candour, though, perhaps, not supported with his usual firmness and resolution.

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. J. YATES.

“DEAR SIR,

“The post which conveys this to you, also conveys a letter to Mr. Bent (of Warrington) requesting a few weeks longer to deliberate upon an answer to the invitation with which, to my great astonishment, the congregation at Warrington have generously honoured me. The partiality of you and your friends confounds and even distresses me, and furnishes me with a powerful additional motive against listening to your application, viz., that I may not sink in your esteem. Seriously, the case stands thus:—I have made proposals to Mr. Coward’s Trustees, with which, if they comply, I am bound by every tie of honour to remain connected with them, as long as in my conscience I may be able. They have not yet returned their answer, nor do I at all expect that they will accede to my plan. I wish I could infuse into them a little of the public spirit of the Warrington Trustees. If they are utterly averse to take any of those spirited steps which, in my apprehension, the exigency of their present circumstances requires, I shall consider myself at perfect liberty to change my situation, and to take into consideration proposals that have been made from any other quarter. One measure I feel myself bound to adopt, if my judgment differs so far from that of Mr. Coward’s Trustees as to

produce a final separation. I must still, if they desire it, continue a twelvemonth at Daventry, to give them time to look out for another Tutor, and to set the Academy upon a proper footing. I should be very sorry that my removal should be iujurious to my Alma Mater, or that the Trustees should have the shadow of a reason to complain that they were not treated with honour and candour. If this delay should be deemed injurious, either to the Academy or the Congregation, I would beg that this letter to you might be considered as a direct negative, and that the Trustees and subscribers would proceed to a new choice, as though no application had been made to me. An answer, in form, to the congregation, I shall hardly be able to write till I return from my journey into the west, upon which I set out to-morrow, and which will occupy six weeks.—I am, dear Sir, your obedient and obliged servant, and affectionate friend,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, July 17th, 1785.*”

[Not sent till the 19th.]

Much time was occupied by Mr. Coward's Trustees in deliberating upon the measures proposed to them respecting the purchase of some buildings adjoining the premises at Daventry, which were considered as necessary to improve the situation of the Academy, but without coming to any decision, further than to continue the institution at Daventry. Mr. Belsham was, therefore, under the necessity of making suitable arrangements for the accommodation of the students, by taking a house for that purpose,

and by disposing of some of the young gentlemen in respectable lodgings in the town—a plan which was both trying and hazardous, and which would have been injurious under any superintendence less vigilant or effective than that which Mr. Belsham had always exercised. Nor is it a little to the credit of the students then under his care, that no irregularity or disorder arose from this measure, and Mr. Belsham had the satisfaction to know, that the confidence which he reposed in these gentlemen was properly estimated and honourably requited.

The following extract is copied from an official letter to Mr. Belsham, dated London, July 26th, 1785 :

“ After repeated meetings of Mr. Coward’s Trustees on the subject of your letter, dated the 7th inst., and of the paper inclosed therein, (meetings repeatedly held, and not from the least disunion in the sentiments of the Trustees, but from their desire to treat it with every possible degree of deliberation,) I have to report to you, that the circumstances of the Trust render it impossible to embrace an object of such magnitude as the removal of Mr. Coward’s branch of the institution to Northampton, in regard to the expenses which must attend such a measure.

“ Our best wishes and affectionate attentions will be constantly exercised towards you, Sir, in every situation and connexion. Our measures are determined by the supreme law of Providence, to which we obediently look up for direction, with fervent supplication for the choicest of heaven’s blessings on the worthy and important functions of your public and private character.

“ We have received the following letter, marked

with the justest affection and respect to you, Sir, to which we defer any reply, wishing the intelligence of every thing that is agreeable to the desires of the subscribers, to come first from yourself.

“ To the Trustees of the late Wm. Coward, Esq.

“ GENTLEMEN,

“ We, the subscribers and members of the congregation of Dissenters at Daventry, being informed that our minister, the Rev. Mr. Belsham, has been invited by the vacant congregation at Northampton to settle with them, and that his removal or continuance, in a good measure, depends upon your determination, we take the liberty of addressing you upon this occasion.

“ The character of Mr. Belsham we venerate ; his labours we greatly and unanimously esteem ; we earnestly wish for his continuance amongst us ; and shall ever be ready to do our utmost to promote his happiness. We have also reason to believe, that he has an affectionate regard for us, and that he may be prevailed on to remain with us, should it appear to you consistent with the prosperity of the Academy, and be agreeable to the will of the great Head of the church. If this should be the case, we should think ourselves highly favoured by a kind Providence, and shall, with great gratitude and pleasure, look to you as friends to our best interests. That you may have the Divine direction in this important affair, and that success may attend all your benevolent endeavours to advance the cause of virtue and religion, is the fervent prayer of us whose names are hereunto subscribed.”

Signed by sixty-two persons.

Under these circumstances, Mr. Belsham was obliged to decline the invitation to Northampton, though his own judgment was decidedly in favour of removing the Academy to so desirable a situation; in reference to which he was not unmindful, that it had been the place of Dr. Doddridge's residence, under whose superintendence and auspices the institution had acquired so much celebrity, and been so extensively useful.

Some of Mr. Belsham's friends thought, persuaded as he was of the advantage of removing to Northampton, that he should have acted in a more determined, a more spirited, and a more independent manner, on the ground that he would have been followed by all the students who were not dependent on Mr. Coward's Trustees; and that these must necessarily have been consigned to him, because there was no other way of disposing of them in which they would have enjoyed equal advantages, nor any other situation that would have been equally agreeable to them. But Mr. Belsham was ever disposed to attribute to Mr. Coward's Trustees the best motives for their determination, and considered them as the best judges of the propriety of it: and he well knew how imprudent it would have been in him to have incurred such responsibility as to act in opposition to the wishes and determination of these gentlemen. He was also influenced by higher and better motives; and it may safely be concluded that the affectionate expression of regard from the members of his congregation at Daventry, communicated above, would

have no little weight in disposing him cheerfully to acquiesce in what appeared to be the design of Providence respecting the sphere of his exertions and usefulness.

The circumstances which determined Mr. Belsham's conduct respecting the invitation from Northampton, contributed, in a similar manner, to form his resolution in regard to that from Warrington, connected as it was with an application to undertake the charge of the Academy; for though there were strong inducements to listen to the solicitations of the friends of that institution, there were reasons which Mr. Belsham never could disregard, which compelled him to decline a situation of so much honour and usefulness, in attending to which Mr. Belsham shewed how much his mind was regulated by a sense of duty, even when it may be supposed that inclination and pleasurable expectation swayed in an opposite direction. It is only justice to Mr. Belsham to allow the reader an opportunity of judging, from the letters of his esteemed and zealous friend, how earnestly he was solicited to comply with the invitation of the Trustees of the Warrington Academy, and how much restraint Mr. Belsham must have imposed upon himself in forming his decision.

“ Everton, Aug. 12th, 1785.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ Your kind favour would not have remained so long unanswered, had I not been from home for a fortnight, and particularly busy since I returned.

You have revived our hopes of again establishing the Warrington Academy; for I really believe its fate depends entirely upon you.

“ The spirit of the public exceeds my expectations; and zeal does not seem to abate, though so long a time has elapsed without doing any thing. Those who first expressed their wish for its revival are more desirous than before, since they have some hope of your engaging in the conduct of it; and the few who, from the day of its suspension, seemed to give it up in despair, when they hear the mention of your name, express an earnest desire of a successful application to you, and offer their services in any way that can contribute to the establishment of the Academy. But if you give up all thoughts of it, I greatly fear all the spirit, zeal, and generosity of the public will have been exerted in vain; for there appears to be no other person in whom there would be perfect confidence; and, anxious as the Trustees are to revive their favourite seminary, they do not wish it unless such men can be engaged in the conduct of it as will induce pupils to come there from a reasonable expectation of receiving peculiar advantages.

“ Most heartily do I wish you knew more of the body of Dissenters in this part of the kingdom, for I believe you would not find *a bare assent* to schemes which you wish to be adopted in a seminary of education, which I suppose is all that you expect from Mr. Coward's Trustees, but a steady approbation of them, and a hearty concurrence in every means of carrying them into execution. You would find the liberal views, and sentiments, and

wishes of your friends to correspond with your own, which would flourish the more when transplanted into a soil adapted to their nature.

“ The first of September is the day fixed for the meeting of the Committee, and it would give me great pleasure to hear, before that day, any thing that would increase our hopes. I am highly gratified by the conduct of the congregation at Warrington, which far exceeds the expectation which I expressed to you of them ; for they have not only invited you without having heard you, but will also wait a year for you. We, who are in the neighbourhood, will endeavour to supply your place as well as we can.

“ There has been no regular meeting of the Trustees of the Academy, but I am confident they will wait the time you mention, if they have a prospect of obtaining their wishes at its expiration.

“ Mrs. Yates and Mr. Davis join in respects and earnest wishes for the enjoyment of your society, with your sincere friend and servant,

“ J. YATES.

“ P.S. Your brethren in the ministry throughout the county wish to greet you.”

From the SAME to the SAME.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I take the first half hour after my arrival at home to inform you that I spent a few hours this morning in waiting upon some of the principal Dissenters in Chester, who said, that while they thought it impossible to engage you to undertake

the office of Divinity Tutor at Warrington Academy, they despaired of its revival, and therefore never came forward to express their good wishes ; but when I intimated my hope of our prevailing upon you, they were greatly elated, and offered their assistance in every way that might contribute to its establishment and perpetuity. You see how absolutely necessary you are to the very existence of our favourite object.

“ I am more strongly impressed than ever with the persuasion that it is desirable on your own account, independently of the idea of the good of the Academy at Warrington, that you should quit your present situation. For, besides the impossibility of ever making Mr. Coward’s Trustees accord heartily in any spirited measures which you may wish to adopt, there is another consideration, which did not affect my mind so strongly before as it now does, viz., that, as Mr. Tayler’s expressions of regret at parting with you shew they are conscious of your wavering about staying with them, it is probable you have offended already as much as it is possible to do by entirely quitting them, and they will for ever doubt your cordiality to them, even if you were to continue at Daventry.

“ Impressed as I am with this opinion, I cannot avoid taking the liberty of saying, that if I were in your situation I would send an immediate resignation of your present office, and I hope, by the same post, you will relieve the good people at Warrington from their anxiety. I wish it might be done, if possible, by a letter that could be received on

Thursday morning, when the Committee of the Trustees of the Academy will meet.

“ With the most fervent wishes that you may make the choice which will be most conducive to your usefulness and happiness, I remain, your faithful friend,

“ J. YATES.

“ *Everton, Aug. 26th, 1785.*”

The subsequent answer to the congregation at Warrington was not sent till a month after Mr. Belsham had signified his determination to the society at Northampton, but the reason for this will appear in his correspondence with Mr. Yates, in which he exculpates himself from the blame to which he had been subjected.

“ Mr. Belsham returns his cordial and respectful thanks to the members of the society of Protestant Dissenters at Warrington, who lately honoured him with an invitation to settle among them as their minister. Possessed as he will ever be with a grateful sense of their unexampled candour and generosity, and happy as he is persuaded he must have been in a connexion with so liberal and respectable a society, it is with genuine regret he acquaints them that, after the most mature deliberation, he finds himself under a necessity of declining their invitation, as his connexion with the Academy at Daventry, and his engagements with Mr. Coward's Trustees, will not admit of his removal from his present situation.

“ *Daventry, Sept. 4th, 1785.*”

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. J. YATES
(Everton, near Liverpool).

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ You have, I presume, by this time, heard of the letter which I sent ten days ago to Warrington, in which I have put a reluctant, but a final negative upon their respectful invitation. I should have written to you upon the subject sooner, but the multiplicity of engagements at the beginning of a session has hitherto prevented me.

“ Had I been at liberty from my present connexion, I should, without hesitation, have accepted the proposal from Warrington, and I question not but that my situation would have been as happy as it must have been respectable; and I am very far from being sure that I have consulted my own interest and comfort in the choice that I have made. But I frankly acknowledge that I could not reconcile my mind to the idea of dissolving my connexion with Mr. Coward’s Trustees in present circumstances. They know and are satisfied with my sentiments; they leave me entirely at liberty as to the conduct of the Academy; and they treat me with the most perfect confidence and friendship. I must also own that the general odium under which they now lie, in consequence of the unhappy step which they have taken in uniting the two Academies, is, with me, a powerful reason for not deserting them at present. I am willing to pass for imprudent, but I could not bear to be reproached as ungenerous.

“ Mr. Coward’s Trustees have not taken a single

step which, in my apprehension, would be advisable in the present exigency of their circumstances, nor have I any reason to expect they will. What the issue of this affair will be with regard to myself, I know not; but I disdain the idea of keeping my friends at Warrington one moment in suspense on this account, and much more of making their application to me a means of securing better terms with Mr. Coward's Trustees. For this reason, I have not written to them since I had the pleasure of an interview with you. I shall now state my sentiments concerning their proceedings very freely to them; and in whatever manner this business may terminate, I shall have the satisfaction of having intended right, even if it should appear, in the event, that I have judged wrong.

“ I hope that the delay of my answer to the application from Warrington will not be considered in the light of disrespect. While the affair was only the subject of a private correspondence between you and me, I did not think myself at liberty to ask the advice of more than two or three of my friends upon it; and, in consequence of my own private deliberation upon the subject, I expressed myself to you in such a manner as I thought most likely to prevent a public application to me: but when the congregation at Warrington, in their generous zeal, made the affair public, I wished to hear the sentiments of my friends upon a subject of so much consequence, and a long journey, which I was about to take, furnished me with a very convenient opportunity for this purpose. This was my sole reason for requesting the delay of a few weeks

before I sent a final answer, and truly sorry should I be if this delay should be misconstrued into an appearance of disrespect, and still more if it should prove, in the least degree, detrimental to the affairs of the Warrington Academy, the revival of which I most devoutly wish, and in the prosperity of which I should most cordially rejoice.

“ My best compliments and thanks are due to the gentlemen who signed the letter which accompanied the invitation, and to the rest of my brethren, who so obligingly expressed their desire of my removal into Lancashire. How happy must I have been in a connexion with gentlemen so friendly, so liberal, so truly respectable !

“ But how, my dear Sir, shall I express to you the respectful, grateful sentiments of my heart for the friendly partiality, and the generous, disinterested zeal which you have manifested in the conduct of this affair ? The disappointment of your exertions in the present instance, will not, I trust, damp the ardour of your zeal upon some future occasion, when those exertions, employed upon a more worthy object, will, I hope, be crowned with better success, which may furnish us both with an additional confirmation of our faith in the glorious doctrine of optimism, which, if I mistake not, forms a part of your creed as well as of my own, and which teaches us to believe that our disappointments, as well as our successes, will eventually terminate in the greatest possible good. Adieu. Let me still retain a place in the circle of your friends. Present my best compliments to Mrs. Yates and Mr. Davis ; and believe me to be, with the truest

regard, dear Sir, your affectionate friend, and obedient, obliged servant,

“ T. BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, Sept. 17, 1785.*

“ P. S. I began this letter a week ago.”

The Rev. J. YATES to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“ *Everton, Sept. 24, 1785.*

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I should not be speaking from that simplicity of heart which has dictated every word of the correspondence which has lately passed between us, if I did not say that I was *surprised* as well as *grieved* when I heard that you had rejected the invitation to Warrington, ‘ though the Trustees of Daventry Academy have not taken’ (as you say) ‘ a single step, which, in your apprehension, would have been advisable in the present exigency of their circumstances.’

“ In your letter to me, after the receipt of the invitation to Warrington, you say, as the reason for taking time to consider it, ‘ I have made proposals to Mr. Coward’s Trustees, with which, if they comply, I am bound by every tie of honour to remain connected with them, so long as in conscience I may be able. If they are averse to take any of those spirited steps which, in my apprehension, the exigency of their present circumstances requires, I shall consider myself as at perfect liberty to change my situation, and to take into consideration proposals that may be made from any other quarter.’

“ When I had the pleasure of meeting you at Ches-

ter, you told me ‘they had not complied with your wishes;’ and as this was the case, and you urged no objection to any of the schemes respecting Warrington Academy, I had very little doubt of our success in the great object of our wishes. I acquainted the congregation with my hopes, and the reason on which they were built. They were elated beyond measure. The Trustees of the Academy, too, had formed the most sanguine expectations; yet you refuse to return their esteem, to gratify their wishes, and to answer their expectations, who have the most earnest desire to comply with, nay, ardently to encourage, all your schemes for the public good, in order that you may continue to shew that you will not ‘desert those who have incurred the public odium,’ and your own disapprobation.

“ You will excuse the liberty I take in this plain statement, when I assure you I have not the least doubt that you have been influenced by ideas of gratitude and affection for the Daventry Trustees, but that I am surprised you should think it necessary to shew these sentiments by continuing in a situation whence every man of your present principles was intended to be excluded, and where you confess you have not sufficient scope for utility.

“ The Congregation and Trustees of Warrington Academy consider the passage above quoted as a *declaration* that you would resign your office at Daventry, (and they considered it as made to *them*, because, after the invitation, they accounted your letter to me as no longer of a private nature,) if the Daventry Trustees did not adopt your proposals.

“ Independent of my attachment to Warrington

Academy, I cannot help taking the liberty of saying I wish you had done so, or rather I wish you would do so still. Though I may offend, I express the wish, because it is dictated by friendship ; and I should have wished you to have treated me with the same openness in the same circumstances.

“In whatever light *you*, my dear Sir, may consider this letter, *I feel* it to be a painful proof of the sincerity and affection with which I am your steadfast friend,

“ J. YATES.

“ P. S. Since your letter arrived, neither the Congregation nor the Academy has shewn any signs of life ; and every Trustee has given up all hope of the revival of the only liberal seminary of education in England.”

The Rev. J. YATES to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“ *Everton, Oct. 5, 1785.*

“ DEAR SIR,

“ Your silence gives me great concern, as it makes me fear I have offended you ; but I had too high an opinion of you to doubt the strict propriety of your sentiments and conduct respecting the late negotiation with the Trustees of Warrington Academy, and I had too much esteem for you not to wish to answer those who thought there was great inconsistency between the expressions which gave them some encouragement, and your last resolutions. I could only say I had no doubt of the propriety of your motives, though I confess to you (and to no one else) that I am very much surprised at your determination.

“ If the unanimous regard of the most respectable people in this county could have made you yield at once to their solicitations, no man would have been more extensively useful than yourself; but I fear, at the next meeting, the Warrington Academy will be given up, and the congregation are beginning, though very reluctantly, to think of another minister; and I am convinced from what you have said of the Daventry Trustees, that it must soon appear necessary for you to quit them.

“ The public disapprobation is seldom fixed upon a body of men who do not deserve it; and if *they do*, I hope you will not think it desirable to countenance them, for this is to prefer the exercise of gratitude to a few individuals to the public interest. We have now an opportunity of uniting all the Dissenters in the kingdom in one object, but nothing can be done without you.

“ If you must quit Daventry, why will you give up the prospect of utility which presents itself at Warrington now, and which, if it vanishes, will not present itself again? for the failure of the present attempt will, I think, for many years prevent another.

“ Not only persons in Lancashire, but others, who have tried the sentiments of distant friends, have a firm conviction that had you come to Warrington, it would have met every encouragement that could be wished in every way. Particularly Mr. Samuel Heywood, of London, with whom I conversed on the subject last night, and Mr. Bright, of Bristol, join me in this opinion, and are as confident of its success in effecting the desired end as I am.

“ There is something which gives me some faint glimmering of hope still, though apparently against all hope. But unless I hear from you in a few days after you receive this letter, I shall be in absolute despair, as the pulpit will soon be engaged, and the Academy finally deserted. I remain your sincere friend and faithful servant,

“ J. YATES.

“ P. S. When you consider my motive, you will not charge me with impertinence in addressing you after your negative, especially when I promise that if your next letter expresses the same resolution, I will not trouble you again.”

The REV. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. J. YATES.

“ *Daventry, Oct. 11, 1785.*

“ DEAR SIR,

“ Faithful are the wounds of a friend, and I should be very unworthy of the share you allow me in your friendship, if I did not think myself obliged to you for that truest test of faithful friendship, admonition for an apprehended error.

“ It is no surprise to me, that in the delicate and embarrassing circumstances in which it has been my lot to be cast, I have not been able, with all the precaution I could use, to extricate myself without giving offence. I hardly flattered myself with the hope of it, though I endeavoured as much as possible to avoid it, by expressing myself upon every subject of our correspondence with all the candour, simplicity, and precision, of which I was master.

“ Nevertheless, I own that it gives me inexpressible concern that my conduct, as to the Warring-

ton application, should have been so far misapprehended as to expose me to the charge of inconsistency in the esteem of gentlemen, the continuance of whose favourable opinion I cannot but earnestly covet, and whose unexampled candour and generosity have given them a claim upon every principle of esteem and gratitude in my breast ; and there are no pains I should be unwilling to take to clear up my character to them, and to convince them that, in the steps I have taken, I have cheerfully sacrificed my own interest to that respect which I considered as due to them.

“ As the event has been, it would have been fortunate if, upon the receipt of the invitation from Warrington, I had immediately returned a negative answer. My true reasons for requesting a few weeks for deliberation were, that I thought it most respectful to the congregation,—that I was, myself, really in suspense, and was urged by many powerful motives to listen to the application,—and that I was desirous of advising with my friends.

“ I am sorry that any of my expressions should have been understood with greater latitude than I intended ; for I really meant no more than what my words literally imported. I still avow that, if Mr. Coward’s Trustees are utterly averse from taking any of those spirited steps which, in my apprehension, the exigency of their present circumstances requires, I shall consider myself at perfect liberty to change my situation, and to take into consideration proposals which may be made from any other quarter ; nor am I conscious that my

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I hope that some other person will soon appear to occupy that important post with far better ability and success; for my vanity is not so excessive as to suffer me for one moment to indulge the thought that the revival of an institution so interesting to the public can depend upon the determination of so obscure an individual as myself. I have only left myself room to add my compliments to Mrs. Yates and Mr. Davis, and to subscribe myself, dear Sir, your faithful and affectionate friend,

“ T. BELSHAM.”

The Rev. J. YATES to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“ *Everton, Nov. 7, 1785.*

“ DEAR SIR,

“ You could not be surprised that the Trustees of Warrington Academy felt some chagrin on receiving your final answer, when you considered the true cause of it, which undoubtedly was, that after they had been a whole year entertaining some hope of success, and all the time feeling a reluctance to think of any other person, and flattering themselves with the prospect of many useful and important schemes to be effected by your exertions, to have them all blasted at once, and at the very time, too, that your long silence had made their hopes more sanguine than ever, could not but raise within them a degree of vexation.

“ I acquainted them with the motives of your conduct at our last meeting, and they expressed a perfect satisfaction that they were good. The only difficulty they felt in reconciling their minds entirely to the event was, that they considered you

had laid before the Trustees of Daventry Academy certain proposals to which, if they did not consent, you should think you had done every thing that honour required, and should be at liberty to listen to an invitation from any other quarter. They considered this declaration as a consent from you that they should wait the event of your proposals to Coward's Trustees ; yet, before this had taken place, you decline the thought of any connexion with them. This, however, arose from the necessity you had laid yourself under of sending an answer to the congregation at Warrington ; but they could not avoid wishing that, at the same time, you had written to them the reason of sending the denial to the congregation, and then they would have had it in their power to have waited a little longer to see the issue of Mr. Coward's Trustees' deliberation.

“ As the event has happened, I am very sorry that I have been the cause of engrossing so much of your time, and raising such anxious wishes in the minds of my friends here ; but, after I knew your sentiments on divinity, I did not think you would long continue in a seminary supported by a fund which was intended for the dissemination of the opposite system, and I still think you will not continue many years in your present situation, and therefore I must ever regret your declining one which is alone fitted for you, and for which you alone are fitted. However, I shall always rejoice that this business has been the means of introducing me to your acquaintance and friendship, to

deserve the continuance of which will ever be the wish and endeavour of your faithful friend and servant,

“ J. YATES.”

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. J. YATES.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ IT was with great pleasure that I learnt from your last letter that the Warrington Trustees are satisfied with the motives which influenced me in the answer I returned to the invitation from the society at Warrington. It would have been an extreme mortification to me to have lain under the slightest suspicion of having acted an unhandsome part, when I had myself been treated with such peculiar generosity and honour.

“ I will not deny that I had myself a thought, and even a wish, that my final answer to Warrington might have been deferred till I had been acquainted with the final decision of Mr. Coward's Trustees ; and had it been so, I know not whether the mortification which I felt, when I found that those gentlemen declined acceding to any one proposal which was made to them with a view to the advantage of the Academy, might not have disposed me to have returned a very different answer to my friends at Warrington ; but the desire of terminating the suspense of a very respectable society, and of avoiding every appearance of a disingenuous reserve, or any step which might prevent the Academy or the Congregation from an immediate application elsewhere, induced me to return a categorical negative, without

acquainting even you, my dear Sir, with the real suspense of my own situation.

“ Nor do I repent the part I acted. Mr. Coward’s Trustees, though their opinions differ from mine, are personally my cordial friends, and would, I believe, do every thing they thought right to make my situation agreeable. I should therefore have been much concerned to have dropped my connexion with them in displeasure. If I must separate from them, I had infinitely rather do it on the ground of principle than of resentment.

“ My principal difficulty is with my congregation, which consists chiefly of the lower classes of people, and a majority of which are, I believe, steady Trinitarians, while their pastor is from day to day growing in his persuasion of the perfect unity of God, and of the importance of a frank and explicit avowal of this fundamental doctrine. I certainly shall not think it my duty to kindle the flame of religious controversy in a society which is at present perfectly harmonious, and to me very affectionate. My connexion with them, therefore, cannot in all probability be of long continuance; and this, to say the truth, is one reason why I feel myself more disposed to acquiesce in the resolution of Mr. Coward’s Trustees, neither to remove to Northampton, nor to enlarge our premises at Daventry.

“ You see I express my mind with perfect freedom, and I am sure you will not abuse the confidence I place in your friendship and discretion.

“ It would give me great pleasure to hear that the Warrington Academy and Congregation were well supplied. A deep sense of gratitude will ever unite

with a regard to the public good, to inspire me with a cordial concern for the interest of both. Adieu, my dear Sir ; present my best compliments to Mrs. Yates, and believe me to be your affectionate and obliged friend and servant,

“ T. BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, Nov. 26, 1785.*”

The Rev. J. YATES to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“ *Everton, Nov. 29, 1785.*

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ YOUR kind favour agitates my mind more than I can express. However I may admire those high ideas of honour from which you acted, in sending your negative to the invitation from Warrington before you received an answer to your proposals respecting Daventry Academy, I cannot but greatly regret the consequence, when you acknowledge that had you waited for that answer, (as both the Trustees and the Congregation at Warrington wished you to do,) the event might have been very different. But pardon me, if in the plainest language of friendship I ask you, whether honour does not now plead unanswerably for us ? In your favour of July 17th, you say, ‘ If Mr. Coward’s Trustees are utterly averse to take any of those spirited steps which in my apprehension the exigency of their present circumstances requires, I shall consider myself as at perfect liberty to change my situation, and to take into consideration proposals that may be made from any other quarter.’ In consequence of this, the Trustees and Congregation at Warrington waited in the utmost anxiety for the issue of those propo-

sals ; and though you did not, indeed, in direct words give them any assurance of your accepting *their invitation*, if those proposals were not acceded to, yet you will acknowledge that the declaration mentioned above, (being given at a time when you knew that the eyes and the hearts of all who had interested themselves in the affairs at Warrington were directed wistfully to you,) together with those numerous expressions of respect which you made, gave them considerable reason to interpret your meaning agreeably to their own wishes. With this idea they waited in anxious expectation. Your answer was sent before Mr. Coward's Trustees had given their express determination respecting your proposals. This at first greatly surprised the Warrington Trustees ; but when you urged the reason of your conduct, they were (though inexpressibly grieved) perfectly satisfied of your honour.

“ But now Mr. Coward's Trustees have given ‘ *their final resolutions* ’ to you, and they ‘ *have declined acceding to any one proposal which was made to them.* ’ You are therefore (according to your own ideas, and I am sure of every other impartial person) ‘ *at perfect liberty to change your situation, and to listen to proposals from any other quarter.* ’

“ I will not say that the Warrington Trustees and Congregation have any *claim* upon your present attention, though they certainly waited, upon the idea that the above-quoted expression was a conditional promise of that attention ; but certainly Mr. Coward's have now no claim at all to urge, and therefore, as you are at *liberty*, if you do not

now listen to us, it must be for some reasons that we know not of.

“ You acknowledge in this day’s favour what I have always thought, that your connexions at Daventry will not probably be of long continuance. And will you then refuse to quit them till Warrington Academy is totally given up? Or do you not think that it presents a sphere of action peculiarly adapted to your enlarged mind? With you we can do every thing we wish, and without you I am fearful we shall do nothing; for since Mr. Holland declined the invitation sent to him, no step has been taken either by the Trustees of the Academy, or by the Congregation. The latter, however, must have a minister very soon, or at least the certainty of one at a stated period; and if they choose one who could not with propriety engage in the Academy, it will be given up for ever.

“ You are the only person in whom they will unanimously unite. Will you, then, suffer the scheme, so important to the interest of truth, liberty, virtue, and piety, to fail for want of your assistance, and continue in a situation which you acknowledge is ‘far from being agreeable to you,’ where you are ‘surrounded with a host of foes’? It is impossible, upon any principles of reasoning of which I can form any idea.

“ The conduct of the Daventry Trustees tells you you are *never* to do any more good there than you do *at present*. On the contrary, our fundamental principle is to lay open our Academy to every species of utility. This must certainly have great

weight with you. Have you any doubts or difficulty with respect to the utility, the expediency, or the success of our plan? Pray mention them, and I dare almost assure you that they shall be removed, if possible.

“ Will you meet me at Lichfield to talk upon the subject? Our correspondence, if you forbid it not, must be quick, but shall be secret; and I trust, zealous as I am for the Academy, I am equally your faithful and affectionate friend,

“ JOHN YATES.”

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. J. YATES.

“ *Daventry, Dec. 4th, 1785.*

“ ‘It is no such easy matter to give up the principles in which we have been educated, no such desirable thing to fly off from the opinions of those with whom we have spent the flower of life, whom we love, and by whom we hope to be loved again.’

“ This is a sentiment advanced by Mr. Taylor, in his admirable letters under the signature of Ben Mordecai. It is a sentiment which I strongly feel, and which must plead my apology if I appear to you, my dear Sir, to act with too great a degree of deliberateness or irresolution in my present critical circumstances.

“ If I were immediately to drop my connexion with the congregation here, a united and affectionate people would be thrown into great perplexity and confusion, and the interest of the Academy, which, considering my long connexion with it, cannot but be very dear to me, would be very ma-

terially injured, at least for the present. These considerations are certainly sufficient to warrant a long pause, and very mature deliberation, previous to my taking a step upon which such important consequences depend.

“On the other hand, by deliberating too long, I lose an opportunity of removing to a situation of great honour, emolument, and usefulness, which if I do not accept, should it again be offered, will probably be occupied by some other person, who I doubt not will be equally well and probably better qualified for the important office. By too great precipitation I involve my present friends and connexions in confusion and distress ; by delay I run a hazard of being myself left destitute and unprovided for. I have no hesitation which alternative to choose.

“Besides, I am not yet without considerable doubts, all things considered, whether it be my duty to quit my connexion with my congregation at present. I abhor the thought of making the pulpit the theatre of religious controversy ; but I make no scruple of speaking my sentiments with openness, nor dare I conceal my firm persuasion of the proper unity of God, yet I do not find that any complaint is made against me, and some of my friends in the congregation, who are perfectly acquainted with my views and principles, profess to believe that the whole society would be perfectly satisfied if they were acquainted with my whole system of doctrine ; but this I much doubt, and most of my friends at a distance, whom I have consulted upon the occasion, give it as their opinion

that I have no reason to make myself uneasy till I find that the society are not satisfied. I must, however, acknowledge that all these arguments do not satisfy me, and that my difficulties increase rather than diminish.

“ I mean to go to London at Christmas, where I shall state the case to one or other of the Trustees, and solicit their advice. If they still desire that I should continue at the head of the Academy, and are willing to remove it for my accommodation when I can stay no longer at Daventry, I think myself bound to remain with them. If, on the other hand, they fix the Academy irrevocably at Daventry, I shall consider it as leave granted to resign the office I hold under them, whenever my connexion at Daventry ceases to be eligible.

“ With respect to Warrington, I consider all engagements on either side as at an end ; and were I now at perfect liberty to remove, I have no right to expect a fresh invitation from that respectable society, after having so peremptorily declined the first. I hardly know, therefore, how to correspond even upon the supposition of a renewed application to me, either from the Congregation or the Academy.

“ I must, however, observe, that my expressions in my letter of the 17th of July were understood in a greater latitude than I intended or expected. I really meant no more than the words literally signified. Generous as the invitation from Warrington was, and prepossessed as I must necessarily be in favour of so respectable a society, I could not

have trespassed so far upon their generosity as to have accepted their invitation previous to a personal acquaintance. I must have made them a visit, and I must have preached to them two or three sabbaths, in the strain which I should have proposed to be the general strain of my ministry among them, and I must have waited to know how far such preaching would have proved agreeable to them, before I could have complied with their invitation ; and I was not without very great doubts indeed, that my sermons might not be generally acceptable to the society, in which case I never could have borne to have forced myself upon the congregation, contrary to their judgment and inclination upon personal acquaintance ; nor did any thing alleviate my doubts upon this subject, till Mr. Cheekly, who was at the ordination at Wrexham, expressed his opinion that the congregation at Warrington would not except against public services conducted in the strain which he heard from me upon that occasion.

“ Upon the whole, I feel myself exceedingly bewildered and perplexed. Were I in a private station, the choice would admit of no hesitation. But when I consider the public character which I sustain, my long and pleasurable connexion with Mr. Coward’s Trustees, and with Daventry Academy and Congregation, I feel myself fettered and unable to stir.

“ As matters now stand, I presume you will agree with me that an interview at Lichfield will not at present answer any valuable end. I can do

nothing till I have seen and conversed with Mr. Coward's Trustees. With respectful compliments to Mrs. Yates, I remain, &c.,

“T. BELSHAM.”

The reader will perceive how greatly Mr. Belsham's embarrassment increased from the rapid and decided change which took place in his mind respecting the doctrine of the Trinity. There is an apparent, and perhaps a real, inconsistency in the sentiments expressed in the following letter, respecting the conduct of the Trustees of the Daven-try Academy, compared with some passages in his letters to Mr. Yates; but it must be observed, that Mr. Belsham's expression of satisfaction is not altogether unguarded, and it should be recollected how fluctuating and agitated the state of his mind was, and how difficult it is in such circumstances to think and act with uniform consistency and propriety. Whatever conclusion may be drawn by the reader, the present writer is convinced that fidelity to his trust requires that this interesting document of the state of Mr. Belsham's mind should form a part of the Memoir which he has pledged himself to furnish :

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. T. TAYLER
(Ely Place).

After briefly adverting to the business of the Academy, Mr. Belsham continues,

“I am perfectly satisfied with the conduct of Mr. Coward's Trustees. I well see the perplexing situation in which they are, and I know not how,

in their circumstances, they could have acted otherwise than they have done. With regard to the affair of Northampton, I look upon it as over. Had Mr. Clark made the offer of his house six months ago, it would have removed all difficulties, but now it is too late ; nor do I, on my own account, much regret it, as I am not at all ambitious of removing from one Northamptonshire congregation to another ; but for the sake of the Academy I am grieved, as I think it would then have been fixed where it ought to be, and would have appeared in a light of respectability which it can never attain in this mean and dirty place.

“ I propose to be in town on the 26th inst., and to continue a fortnight in the vicinity of London, in which time I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you often, and shall be extremely thankful for your answer to the following questions, which have of late given my mind a great deal of uneasiness, and which I now propose to you in the confidence of friendship, and not as one of Mr. Coward’s Trustees.

“ Quest. I. Is it right that a minister, who is not a Trinitarian, and who thinks it his duty upon proper occasions to avow his sentiments, should continue with a congregation, the majority of which are Trinitarians, and who invited him upon the supposition of his being of the same sentiments with themselves ?

“ Quest. II. Is it right that a person of this description should continue at the head of an Academy upon which the greater part of Dissenting congregations depend for supplies ; and would it

not be more for the advantage of that interest, that it should be under the care of a more orthodox tutor? For an orthodox tutor who is tolerably liberal, will always send out heterodox pupils enow to supply the few congregations who want ministers of that stamp; but it is hardly to be expected that a heterodox tutor will send out many pupils more orthodox than himself; and when his sentiments come to be known, and it is impossible that they should be concealed, will it not prove a disadvantage to the Academy, and consequently to the Dissenting interest at large?

“ Brought up as I was ‘in the strictest sect of our religion,’ having no idea of any other sentiments before I came to the Academy than those which are taught in the Assembly’s Catechism, I was always taught, both by my parents and tutors, to keep my mind open to conviction, and to be willing to embrace and to profess truth, wherever I found it, at all hazards. I believe few persons have inquired with a more anxious concern than myself into the Trinitarian controversy; and though upon the most diligent and impartial investigation of the subject, I think that I see the most satisfactory evidence of the pre-existence of the Son of God, and even of his eternity, and that he was the maker of the world, and the medium of all the divine dispensations; yet I think I see with equal clearness that he derived his existence and all his powers from the Father, that he is entirely dependent upon him and subject to him, and that he is in all respects infinitely inferior to the one only living and self-existent Jehovah. And I cannot but consider the

unity of God to be a doctrine of such high importance, that it ought, upon all proper occasions, to be asserted in the most explicit manner, ‘whether men will hear or whether they will forbear.’

“You will easily judge, my dear Sir, how much my mind is perplexed with these difficulties ; sometimes thinking it to be my duty to remove, at other times seeing the matter in a very different light. It is no pleasant, it is no easy thing, to resign sentiments, connexions, and friends whom long habit has endeared ; but what can be done, if they cannot be retained consistently with a clear conscience ? I have no spiritual knight-errantry in my constitution. I have no ambition to be ranked in the number of the Lindseys or the Disneys of the age ; and am the farthest in the world from being inclined to ‘meddle with those who are given to change.’ I should be thankful to have it proved to my satisfaction that it is my duty to continue united to my present connexions, than which I am sure that none can, in other respects, be more honourable or more agreeable.

“I should be glad to talk over the case with you, and to hear your mature, impartial sentiments upon the subject. I promise myself this pleasure in my approaching visit to London. I have not opened my mind so freely to any person upon this subject before ; but really the difficulties press so much upon me, that it is necessary for me to take the advice of some of my wisest friends upon this business.

“You will easily see, from what I have now written, the reason of my utter refusal to lay out

money of my own in Daventry, and of my indifference about removing to Northampton. I wish the Academy were at the latter place ; but if it is determined to continue it here, I cannot help thinking the purchase of the adjoining premises of the highest importance.

“ We go on, upon the whole, as well as I think can be expected ; but the care of forty young gentlemen is too heavy a burden for any individual to undertake, at least for one who is not better qualified for the office than the present director of the Academy. The weight is sometimes almost insupportable. Yours, &c.,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, Dec. 11th, 1785.*”

It would not be difficult to conjecture what were the sentiments of his respected friend upon these important questions. The exposition which Mr. Belsham gives of his religious faith, probably approached so nearly to his own, that Mr. Tayler could not think he had departed so widely from the standard of reputed orthodoxy as to render it necessary to resign his office either as pastor or tutor, or the same obligation would have rested upon Mr. Coward's Trustee to withdraw from the management and disposal of the fund. The fact, that Mr. B. retained his situation at Daventry for more than three years after this period, clearly shews that the Trustees did not think it necessary, either in their individual or official capacity, to advise or require his resignation. Indeed, they were well assured of the fidelity and impartiality with which Mr. Bel-

sham would discharge the duties of his office, as long as he continued in it ; of the fairness and ability with which he would lead his pupils to the investigation of the controverted doctrines of religion, and of the conscientious integrity with which he would retire, when he could no longer conduct the studies of the young men who were candidates for the Christian ministry, in a manner that, liberally considered, would be consistent with the intentions of the testator. Accordingly we find, that when the difference of his religious opinions increased, and was discovered by himself to be greater than he imagined, he withdrew from this situation in consequence of his own convictions, and from a sense of duty, and not because he was required to do so by any resolution or decision of the gentlemen who had the management of the trust.

From what has been already stated, and will farther appear, it will be seen how gradually and imperceptibly Mr. B. was led to renounce those opinions which he had considered as correct and evangelical, but which he was finally compelled to regard as utterly inconsistent with the whole tenor of the gospel, and with the repeated declarations of Christ and his apostles.

Mr. Belsham's time appears to have been so much occupied during this period, that little attention was paid to his diary: The memoranda which do occur are very much dictated by the predominant feeling of his mind, and are expressed in the language which so strongly marks his recorded sentiments of his failings and deficiencies. The most important is that which intimates the attention he

was paying to the disputed doctrines of theology, as noticed in the conclusion of these extracts.

“ Sunday evening, Jan. 16.—In the afternoon I delivered a discourse consisting of meditations upon the events, transactions, and improvements of the last year, and recommending good resolutions for time to come. I do not know what impression the discourse might make upon the minds of my hearers, but I can truly say I never delivered one which more faithfully recorded my own experience. I was a good deal affected in composing it. I was very serious during the whole service; and in administering the Lord’s Supper, introduced with an exhortation to join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant. I was attentive, and more serious than affectionate. O that I could always feel as I then felt !”

“ Lord’s-day evening, Oct. 23.—What mercies have I not received since I last wrote in this book, before, during, and since the long vacation ! What protection in journeys—what kindness from friends—what pleasing and improving interviews ! What important scenes have I passed through, in the application from Warrington, from Northampton, and in the junction of the two Academies ! What means of grace—what opportunities of religion—some of them delightful ; the ordination of Mr. Kenrick and Mr. Browne ; many of these opportunities neglected and lost ! And oh, what unworthy returns ! what ungrateful conduct ! Out of my own mouth am I condemned ; yet will I not despair, for with God is plenteous redemption.”

“ Lord’s-day evening, Nov. 20.—I know not that business has been remarkably neglected in the past week. Devotion has not been attended to with that seriousness which it ought. The recollection of what is past is a source of continual disquietude.—My mind has been greatly occupied with thoughts relating to the doctrine of the Trinity.”

The closing of the Academy at Hoxton was regarded by many as a great disadvantage to the Dissenting interest and to the Dissenting congregations in and near the metropolis. A design was therefore formed of instituting a new Academy upon a larger scale, and upon the most liberal principles. An appeal was made to the Dissenting public, which was generously answered by individuals, both in town and in the country. A more lively interest and a warmer zeal had scarcely ever been excited, and it appeared not only to be the earnest and unanimous wish of the friends of learning and free inquiry that such a seminary should exist, but every one was emulous to give it his support, and to furnish the necessary contributions for its establishment. In an early stage of their deliberations, the Committee appointed for effecting this purpose applied to Mr. Belsham, through his friend Mr. Rickards, as one well qualified to give advice upon so important a subject. The following is Mr. Belsham’s reply, containing a statement of the internal regulations of the family at Daventry, and his sentiments upon the plan proposed by the Committee for the regulation of the new seminary.

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to Mr. RICKARDS.

“Daventry, Feb. 12, 1786.

“DEAR SIR,

“I am much flattered that the gentlemen of the Committee do me the honour and the justice to believe that I am a sincere well-wisher to the plan of the new Academy, and that the advancement of learning, liberality, and virtue among the Dissenters at large, lies much nearer my heart than any little interest of my own. I profess myself not the man of a party, but the servant of the Dissenting interest ; and if that interest, which I consider as intimately connected with the cause of truth, virtue, science, and religion, be advanced, my end is answered, whatever be the means, and whoever be the instruments. And you, my dear Sir, will, I am sure, give me full credit when I aver that I should retire into the shade of obscurity with far less reluctance than I obeyed the summons to appear in the public and important character which I at present sustain.

“I beg the favour of you to return my best thanks to the gentlemen with whom you are connected, for the respectful manner in which the Academy at Daventry is mentioned in the printed resolutions. I am also much obliged by the favourable sentiments they have expressed concerning the present director of it ; and to yourself, in particular, for your communication of the intelligence. The applause of the wise and good, next to the testimony of conscience, and the approba-

tion of a still higher tribunal, is one of the best rewards of virtue to an ingenuous mind, and one of the most powerful incentives to perseverance in the discharge of duty. It will not, I hope, be deemed an unbecoming vanity in me to avow myself not wholly insensible of its influence.”

(After stating some of the principal rules of the institution and the pecuniary penalties annexed to the violation of them, Mr. Belsham continues,)

“These are the rules of the family, which have subsisted, with very little variation, for forty or fifty years, but I think them very capable of improvement.

“It is a rule with me never to exact fines, but where they are a real and sufficient compensation for the offence, viz., for not rising in a morning, for not delivering a thesis at the proper time, &c. Absence from family prayers or lectures, without leave, or spending the night out of the house, I should consider as offences for which no pecuniary mulct was a proper compensation, and therefore should never exact it, lest it should encourage the idea that the payment of the fine was equivalent to a strict conformity to the rules of the house. Upon this principle I disapprove of annexing fines to such irregularities as these. I would rather represent them as utterly inadmissible, and as totally disqualifying a person for continuing a member of the family.

“You are pleased to ask my opinion concerning the propriety of appointing a steward to provide the commons of the house. I am clearly of opinion that such an office is exceedingly undesirable, unless the resident Tutor positively declines to

undertake the boarding of the students. It would not perhaps be an easy thing to find a proper person ; it would add considerably to the expense of education at the seminary, as the steward would no doubt expect a handsome profit for his trouble ; and, unless I am greatly mistaken, it would introduce great irregularity into the family, especially at meals. There can be no doubt that it would be most eligible for the Academy that the residentiary Tutor should board the students ; and if a sufficient allowance is made, as no doubt there will, I think that the inconvenience and trouble of providing for them is not very great, and young people, if they see that they are well used, are easily satisfied.

“ I am afraid of appearing officious in obtruding advice unasked ; yet I will beg leave to hint a query, whether a monthly public examination of all the students, conducted by a committee, nearly upon the plan of the annual examinations by Mr. Coward’s Trustees, and to which all the subscribers to the Academy should be admitted, would not be a means of interesting the friends of the Academy in its support and prosperity, of encouraging the Tutors, of exciting an ardent spirit of emulation in the pupils, and of adding dignity and importance to the institution.

“ The object of the weekly visiting committee I am not perhaps sufficiently acquainted with to form a proper judgment concerning it. I will not, therefore, presume to give any opinion upon the subject. The gentlemen of the Committee must be well apprized that they are in this instance *treading upon tender ground*, and, without any advice of

mine, they will take proportionable heed to their steps.

“ Je suis par métier royaliste, and may, perhaps, like other men in office, be rather too fond of absolute power. Yet I believe that the gentlemen of the Committee will agree with me, that it will greatly promote the order and peace of the family to strengthen the hands and support the authority of the resident Tutor ; to subject him as little as possible to foreign influence and controul ; and to leave all disputes between tutors and pupils to be settled by themselves, except in particular emergencies, which, it is to be hoped, will seldom or ever occur, and for which it seems unnecessary to provide.

“ Whatever authority is lodged, and known to be lodged, in the hands of a prudent tutor, he will be very sparing indeed in the exertion of it ; and the high spirit of young collegians, together with the regard which he will pay to his own interest and character, and to the prosperity and reputation of the Academy, will form a very sufficient barrier against all unreasonable and arbitrary measures.

“ I have hinted every thing material which has occurred to me upon the subject upon which you and the gentlemen who act with you have done me the honour of asking my opinion ; and if in any other instance they should favour me with an opportunity of shewing my respect to them, and my sincere good-will to the rising seminary, they will confer an additional obligation upon, my dear Sir, your and their obliged and obedient servant,

“ T. BELSHAM.”

Whilst these efforts were making in the metropolis, and in other places, the establishment of an Academy in the northern part of the kingdom continued to be an object of earnest desire with many zealous friends of the Warrington institution. Though Mr. Belsham had discouraged any further application from this quarter, Mr. Yates could not refrain from making another effort to induce him to comply with the wishes of its friends, and to obtain his support and assistance in the revival of that seminary. But though Mr. Belsham gave a patient attention to Mr. Yates's statement and argument, he did not alter his opinion of the line of conduct which it was incumbent upon him to pursue. The following letters upon the subject will be acceptable to the reader, and will shew the state of the Dissenting interest at this period.

The Rev. J. YATES to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“Everton, Feb. 17th, 1786.

“DEAR SIR,

“Though I shall sincerely lament the final ruin of the Warrington Academy, yet I shall be much more reconciled to it, by the resolution of the London gentlemen to establish one in or near the metropolis. This resolution does not, however, in my opinion, supersede the necessity or the practicability of reviving Warrington, or of establishing another academy in this part of the kingdom.

“It is desirable to have such seminaries in different places, for I am convinced that many persons would send their sons to a place of education esta-

blished in this neighbourhood, who would not send them even so far as Daventry; and the greater number of academies we have, the greater number of young men will be brought up to the ministry.

“And with respect to the practicability of establishing one in the northern part of the kingdom, I do not think with you, that the liberal Dissenters can support only one; for if Mr. Coward’s Trustees will give exhibitions to divinity students, I conceive as much would be raised, in this county alone, as would support an academy; and as I hope there will be some persons found here who would cheerfully contribute to the support of the intended academy in London, so I doubt not the existence of the same generous spirit in London. On the other hand, as many persons are influenced by local circumstances, I fear, if there be no academy in this part of the country, many of the subscriptions promised to Warrington will not be transferred to London, and consequently will be lost to one of the most important objects of charity.

“The Dissenters of Manchester are very desirous of establishing a seminary there, and of transferring thither the library, philosophical apparatus, &c., belonging to the late Academy at Warrington, and the subscriptions to its support; and it is not improbable that this scheme will succeed, though many still wish Warrington to be the seat of the institution, on account of the buildings.

“Mrs. Yates and Mr. Davies join in respects to you, with your sincere friend and humble servant,

“JOHN YATES.”

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. J. YATES.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I felt myself particularly obliged by your favour, both as it shews that you have not taken offence at the laconic brevity of my letter, addressed to you at Christmas; and as it evinces that you are still in charity with a person whom you cannot but look upon as in some degree accessory to the ruin of a scheme which your generous and zealous exertions prove to have lain very near your heart.

“ The hurry and avocations of London engrossed my time so much, that it was with extreme difficulty I seized a few minutes to indite an answer to your last very interesting letter, and to put a final period to a negociation which has occasioned more perplexity of mind, and of the propriety of the final issue of which I am more doubtful, than of any other affair in which I have been concerned.

“ I have often wished, but, alas! wishes are vain, that the vacancy at Warrington had not happened just at the time that it did. The event of our negociation might then, perhaps, have been different. I now think I should have had no reason to repent had I cast myself upon the generosity of the Lancashire Dissenters, though to me, personally, perfect strangers. But at the time when it was necessary for me to come to a positive determination upon the subject, my mind was not so perfectly made up with respect to some important points as, in consequence of a very close investigation of them, it now is; neither had I then all those lights to direct

me which I now possess. I think it probable that, so far as my own peace and comfort are concerned, I have made an erroneous choice ; but I am persuaded that, situated as I was at the time, and with the views which I then had of the question, I could not, and ought not, to have determined differently ; and, therefore, whatever reason there may be for regrets, I am conscious of none for self-condemnation, and, as a professed optimist, I persuade myself that all will eventually be well, and that the present disappointment of favoured projects, inclinations, and interests, will be over-ruled by a good Providence to answer the most valuable ends.

“ I wrote from London under the full apprehension that all thoughts of reviving the northern Academy were given up. I know that many of the friends and old subscribers to Warrington were engaged in the support of the new London Academy, and I also know that the dissolution of the Warrington Academy was the principal reason assigned for the enlargement of the plan of the London institution ; and that the friends of that institution depended upon the support of the Warrington Trustees, and hoped for the use of the Warrington library and apparatus. I instantly resolved that no impediment should arise from me, and under this impression I penned my last address to you. I have since found that the gentlemen in London were too sanguine in their expectations, and you have communicated to me the interesting intelligence, that the Lancashire Academy is to be revived at Manchester, where I hope it will shine with re-

doubled splendour, and I shall be glad to see my gloomy theory concerning the numbers and influence of the liberal Dissenters contradicted by fact. Nor can you much wonder that, living as I do in the land of darkness, I should form an erroneous judgment of the regions of light.

“ Yet let me be allowed to drop a tear of sorrow and sympathy over the ruins of Warrington. I know not how to think without poignant regret on the approaching desecration of those buildings, so long the seat of learning and the muses, and which the venerable names of Taylor and Aikin will render dear to every friend of science and virtue as long as the Dissenting interest shall last.

“ I now see myself in a situation in which my labours will very soon become useless to the Dissenting interest. Two academies, conducted by respectable tutors, and supported by the contributions of the liberal Dissenters, will amply supply their respective congregations with ministers. And I am very sure that the diligent, impartial study of the Scriptures, which is the only plan of study which I can conscientiously recommend to my pupils, will never lead to orthodoxy, nor will a courageous and conscientious profession of important truth conduct them to popularity. I doubt not, therefore, that my path will soon be clear to the peaceful shade of retirement, to which I shall return with a more contented mind than when I was reluctantly dragged forth to figure on the public theatre in the conspicuous character in which I now appear. I have hardly left room for compliments to Mrs. Yates and Mr. Davies, and to sub-

scribe myself your affectionate and obliged friend and servant,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.

“*Daventry, March 19, 1786.*”

The Rev. J. YATES to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“*Everton, March 29, 1785.*

“DEAR SIR,

“After writing the letter which yesterday’s post forwarded to you, I received a visit from Mr. Heywood, of London, when we had a very long and interesting conversation about the best means of applying the generous spirit which is now roused among the liberal Dissenters, and of making it as productive as possible of good to our cause. He is clearly of the opinion, which I have always entertained, that it is highly desirable to have a reputable academy, moderately orthodox, to receive all those pupils who will otherwise go to the independent academies. By this plan many young men, who would otherwise be violently bigoted and enthusiastic, would be gained to the rational system, and make thousands of proselytes. Daventry has hitherto done this great good; but, while you continue there, can do it no longer, because your heterodoxy is talked of, and you will soon be as objectionable as ever any divinity tutor was at Warrington.

“I could not help expressing a wish that you could still be prevailed upon to come. If that could be effected, Mr. Heywood observed, London and Warrington would be esteemed sisters; whereas our distant friends never would encourage the Mau-

chester scheme; but, he added, it is vain to think of what is impracticable, though it would establish our interest upon an immoveable basis. I answered, I had no ground to hope, but merely the opinion that if I was in the situation of Mr. Belsham I would exchange it for Warrington, as affording a better prospect of future usefulness. I took the liberty of reading to him that part of your letter where you give reasons for thinking you shall ere long retire, which struck him very much, and he desired me to write and ask, whether any considerations could induce you to take a step which every honest man must applaud, and which would give joy to the whole body of liberal Dissenters, and unite them in the support of two academies, the most respectable that ever existed. I foresee so many great advantages from this scheme, that I am convinced it would form a new era in the history of Dissenters."

(Mr. Yates then enters into a statement of the means by which two academies might be supported, and of the efforts which had been made, and would be made, for this purpose, and of the loss which would be sustained by the sale of the buildings, if the Academy were not revived at Warrington. He concludes) "Mr. Heywood will be in Liverpool again in ten days, before which time I hope to receive your sentiments on this important subject. Mrs. Yates and Mr. Davies join in respectful compliments to you, with your affectionate and faithful friend,

" J. YATES."

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. J. YATES.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ The situation in which I find myself is very singular and very perplexing. No person can be more sensible than myself, that I am not a proper Tutor for an Academy at Daventry ; and yet, such are my connexions, and such my engagements, that it seems to me exceedingly difficult, if not absolutely impossible, to remove.

“ With regard to the plan of reviving the Warrington institution, which you and Mr. Heywood have done me the honour to propose, the following objections, among some others, appear to be insuperable.

“ If I am rightly informed, the foundations of the new Manchester Academy are already laid. If so, the gentlemen who subscribe to that institution are too far engaged to retreat, and, therefore, I should suppose, could never cordially accede to the plan of the revival of Warrington.

“ I am also well assured, that many gentlemen in London, who are the warmest friends and supporters of the new Academy, have indulged very sanguine expectations, I pretend not to determine upon what grounds, of being allowed the use of the Warrington library and apparatus ; and I should be considered by them as acting a very inconsistent part, if, after all the professions I have made of friendship to their new Academy, I were to take a step, the immediate consequence of which would be the disappointment of one of their favourite objects.

“ To Daventry, therefore, for the present at least, I am bound by a sort of invisible, yet almost indissoluble chain. How Providence will dispose of my future lot, I cannot pretend to conjecture. I wait the course of events, curious but not anxious to see the issue.

“ I beg the favour of you to present my respectful compliments to Mrs. Yates, and also to Mr. Heywood, not forgetting my old friend Mr. Davies; and accept, my dear Sir, my very sincere thanks for those testimonies of your esteem with which you have so repeatedly honoured your affectionate, &c.,

“ T. BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, April 6, 1786.*”

The observations which Mr. Belsham has made in his diary during this period are more ample than in the preceding year, and become still more interesting, as they exhibit traces of the change which was gradually taking place in his religious sentiments. They will also be acceptable to the reader as indicating a more satisfied and happier state of mind, though still mixed with much self-reproach and occasional dejection.

“ Lord’s-day evening, Feb. 5th.—I have been more regular in secret devotion this week than I too often have been; and I was much affected at the Tuesday evening’s conversation;* and never more serious than on Friday morning in family devotion. I have found great advantage in drawing up the prayer; it was of great use when my

* At a weekly meeting of some of the members of the congregation, held in the chapel vestry, at which the minister attended.

thoughts were much distracted.—The temper of my mind in an evening is exceedingly low, and dejected to a degree that sometimes alarms me. O that the tumult of my thoughts might be composed ! O that order and peace might be restored to my wounded spirit !”

Mr. Belsham observes in his diary, that in the morning he preached from 1 Thess. i. 10 : “ Even Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come.” On the blank leaf of the manuscript sermon, now before the writer, he has made the following remarks, without affixing any date ; but it is probable they were made about the time that similar observations were recorded, which have already been submitted to the reader :

“ Very consistent with the principles which the author maintained at the time when the discourse was composed and preached, and such as all who hold these principles ought to express, and naturally would express—but that one so miserably entangled in the web of theological prejudice should ever have been set at liberty—that one so totally blind should ever have been made to see, is truly wonderful. It can never be sufficiently admired, and ought to be most gratefully acknowledged. ‘ By the grace of God I am what I am.’ ”

“ Lord’s-day evening, Sept. 3.—What a vast variety of scenes have I passed through since I last wrote in my diary !* What mercies have I to be thankful for ! What sins to confess and implore the forgiveness of, if not too late to repent and

* Mr. Belsham had been to Dublin and to Scotland during the vacation.

obtain mercy ! What trials to exercise my faith and fortitude ! I never felt a severer shock than in the removal of Mr. Rickards. He was one of my best and wisest friends, the person with whom I first consulted, when applied to to take the charge of the Academy.

“Return unto thy rest, O my soul ! O my God, receive thy wandering servant. Do not cast me off.—I call to remembrance my former days, and amidst innumerable fears and discouragements, I presume to hope that I shall in the end taste that the Lord is gracious. Calm the tumult of my disordered mind ; lift up the light of thy countenance on a dark, benighted soul, and once more restore order, consolation, and peace.”

With his usual sympathy and affection, Mr. Belsham addressed the following letter to the lady of his lamented friend on this mournful occasion :

“MY DEAR MRS. RICKARDS,

“I write not to administer consolation, which it is neither in my power to give, nor in yours to receive. I write merely to express to you how sincerely, how tenderly I sympathize with you in your late heavy, unexpected, irreparable loss.

“I heard the melancholy tidings while I was upon my journey, and I ought to have written to you before, but I could not summon up sufficient resolution. It is even now one of the most painful tasks I have ever undertaken.

“That God is the author of this distressing event, and that the great Judge of all the earth will do right, is a thought which, in your present cir-

cumstances, must frequently have occurred to you; and this consideration, I doubt not, has kept you, and will still preserve you, from all undue murmuring. To expect more than this from you, is to expect more than human nature can perform. It must feel, and must express its feelings; and our heavenly Father, who only inflicts the stroke when he sees it needful for us, well knows how deep it penetrates, and makes a compassionate allowance for human infirmity. He alone can pour the balm of consolation into the wounded spirit; and that he may do so into yours, has been the fervent language of every prayer which I have breathed forth to heaven since I was acquainted with the melancholy tidings.

“ My heart was so full of the subject, and so much impressed by the sudden removal* of my loved and honoured friend, that I could not avoid taking occasion from it to urge my hearers to be followers of them who through faith and patience are inheriting the promises. An event so awful and important conveys many valuable lessons of instruction, even to those who are not particularly acquainted with the persons concerned.

“ Those of my friends here who have the pleasure of knowing you, tenderly sympathize with you upon the mournful occasion, particularly my sisters and Mr. Pett, who all desire to be affectionately remembered to you.

“ I will not trouble you with a long letter. I wish, but fear to visit you, for ah, how different !

* His disorder was the gout, which particularly affected his head; and as it deprived him of sense, though with lucid intervals, he had but little pain.

—but I forbear to dwell upon the painful thought. We know that all must be right ; and though at present we cannot see how it is, we shall know hereafter. Adieu, my dear Madam. May the eternal God be your refuge, and the happiness of immortality in the society of those nearest to your heart, in due time compensate for all the peculiar severity of your pilgrimage through this dark vale of sorrow and tears ! This is the fervent wish and prayer, dear Madam, of your affectionate friend and obliged servant,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, Aug. 17th, 1786.*”

Mr. Belsham continues his remarks in his diary.

“ Sunday evening, Sept. 10th.—This week is not a week that I review with so much uneasiness as many others. I feel enough in me to make me humble and watchful ; but thank God I am at present in a very different state from what I was a few weeks ago. O that my goodness may be permanent ! And in order to this, O Father of mercies ! ‘ lead me not into temptation.’ Thou knowest my weakness and frailty. O give me not up to the devices and desires of my own heart ! A ray of hope beams on my soul ; O let it not be extinguished !”

“ Lord’s-day evening, Oct. 1st.—Last week I was at the meeting of ministers at Kettering. My journey delightfully pleasant. I had many serious, affecting, useful thoughts as I rode by myself. I cannot help hoping that my character is in some degree improving. I meet with trials. I have met with some this week. Ingratitude and unkindness

where I might have expected affection. I thank God I was enabled to keep my temper. I think I almost see a glimpse of peace of mind. O that I may find it and enjoy it, and never part with it again! I think I see more and more of the hand of God in events, and that I advance somewhat in a devotional temper; but I feel great imperfection still. I feel and know enough of myself to make me fearful and cautious. ‘Hold thou me up, O God, and I shall be safe.’”

“Lord’s-day evening, Oct. 22d.—I was at Worcester last Lord’s-day,—my visit upon the whole very melancholy. I went from one house of mourning to another; I trust not the less useful. ‘It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.’ Since I returned, having been crowded with company, I have found little time for proper business. Since I last wrote in my diary, I have seen great reason to acknowledge my frailty and my folly. I have been shewn the weakness of my own heart. O Lord, still keep me out of the way of temptation! Let it not be in my power to fall from thee, and let not my heart be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin!”

“Lord’s-day evening, Oct. 29th.—I have been very much engaged in examining texts concerning the pre-existence of Christ. Anxious for information, I hope I would divest my mind of prejudice, and follow truth wherever it leads, and whatever be the consequence. I have sometimes been off my guard, and spoken warmly, when I did not wish it. At times I have had strong religious feelings, and no small consolation and hope. I have been enabled

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to see the hand of God in my trials, and though they be great and oppressive, to bow to his will. I search after truth, but I do not find that it meliorates and mends the temper and the heart in the manner I could wish."

" Lord's-day evening, Nov. 12th.—Sacrament day.—In the preparation service I was a good deal impressed and more serious than usual. At the devotional lecture, (the subject, ' Behold I have told you before,') more affected than ever I have been upon such an occasion. I described the character of an upright advocate of truth ; the consequences of diligent application to the study of it, and of the open and faithful avowal of what is received as important truth ; and endeavoured to suggest motives to reconcile those who would sustain this character, to the event. I was enlarged and affected in prayer afterwards. The two or three last days have been days of more religious enjoyment and satisfaction than I expected, or have often enjoyed ; but I am far from being elated. To will is present, but to do good I find not. I have felt of late what I hoped I should never have felt again. I have done what I hoped I never should have repeated. I cannot do the good I would. I find the conflict still continues, and that there is still need of penitence, of humility, of watchfulness, and of self-denial. I have gone astray like a lost sheep. O seek thy servant, for I have not forgotten thy word !"

" Lord's-day evening, Nov. 26th.—In the review of the week I see reason to acknowledge that the mercy of God hath exceeded my desert. I am particularly indebted to restraining grace. O let me

ever thankfully acknowledge it. Were it not for this, into what depths of folly and misery should I be plunged ! I too much neglect devotion. I often think of God. I hope I can say that the idea of God is connected with almost every action and every event ; but I do not address myself directly to him so frequently as I ought, nor with that life and zeal which I have been used to do. This is often owing to rising too late in the morning. Of this habit I must cure myself.”

“ Lord’s-day evening, Dec. 3.—My mind is much occupied with investigating the Socinian scheme, and I sometimes almost waver with respect to it. I do not know how the present state of things will issue. The uneasiness I meet with among my pupils, the alteration of my own sentiments upon doctrinal points, and the circumstances of the New Academy,* all seem to prognosticate that my continuance here will not be long. Thank God, I am easy with respect to the event. I only pray that I may be directed into the way of duty, and preserved from too severe temptation.”

“ Lord’s-day evening, Dec. 10.—I have been serious in seeking after truth, but I cannot satisfy my mind upon some important subjects.”

“ Lord’s-day evening, Dec. 17.—I review the week with pain,—not that my time has been much thrown away ; but devotions have been neglected.

* Instituted at Hackney, in consequence of the closing of the Institution at Hoxton. It opened with favourable auspices, and was conducted under the superintendence of Dr. Rees, as Resident Tutor, and of Dr. Kippis, and nominally of Dr. Price, but the latter never delivered any lectures.

Thoughts and dispositions, which I thought crucified, have revived. Devotion too much neglected. When I would do good, evil is present. I sometimes think that I must give up the contest. Nothing will avail but retirement from the world. But oh ! how can I fly from myself ! O thou Source of light and purity, irradiate my bewildered mind : lead me into the knowledge of the truth, and let that truth set me free.”

The change which had taken place in Mr. Belsham's religious sentiments does not appear to have been a sufficient ground, in the view of Mr. Coward's Trustees, for dissolving the connexion which subsisted between him and them ; and in the consciousness that he had concealed nothing from them, Mr. Belsham was satisfied to continue in the situation which he then held. It is probable Mr. Belsham himself was not aware of the extent of his departure from that system of faith and doctrine which had recommended him to the choice of the gentlemen at the head of this Trust, and of the congregation at Daventry, and little did he apprehend how much farther his diligent inquiry and impartial investigation would compel him to recede from it. But the integrity of his mind is unquestionable. He would not for an hour have retained a situation which he thought he could not retain with propriety and honour. It is gradually and by slow degrees that the light of truth breaks in upon an inquiring and candid mind ; and till conviction is complete and ample, the clearness and brightness of its lustre will not be fully perceived. Whilst he was able to conduct the studies of his pupils con-

sistently with the design of the friends and supporters of the institution, and with the general sentiments of that class of Dissenters who looked to this Academy for a supply of intelligent, pious, and useful ministers, he had little difficulty in acceding to the advice and wishes of those who urged him to defer his resignation ; and the consciousness which he must have felt of the fairness and impartiality with which he endeavoured to fulfil the duties of his office, would tend to satisfy his mind, that he neither acted inconsistently with the dictates of sincerity nor of conscience. The following is a correct statement of his fidelity and ingenuousness in his own words. It is extracted from a letter, dated Oct. 2, 1787, addressed to the Rev. Thomas Reader, of Taunton, who with the most friendly and Christian design had endeavoured to convince Mr. Belsham of the error into which he was supposed to have fallen, and to point out the deficiency of that system of instruction which he adopted. Mr. Belsham replies,

“ My method of instructing my pupils is to state every system, to propose the arguments for, and the objections against it, to direct them to a critical investigation of the true meaning of the sacred oracles, to recommend candour, diligence, humility, impartiality, patience, and perseverance in the pursuit of truth, and fervent prayer to God for divine illumination. I then leave them to judge for themselves, as in the presence of God, and accountable to him. Further than this I cannot go. If I were infallible myself, I would pronounce authoritatively, this is truth and this is error ; but while I recom-

mend humility to them, arrogance and dogmatism would be peculiarly unbecoming in myself.

“ You insinuate it as your opinion that I ought to quit my present situation. Indeed, Sir, it was neither vanity nor ambition which placed me here. I neither solicited nor wished for my present arduous, important office; and I shall cheerfully and thankfully obey the first intimation of Divine Providence to retire again to obscurity and to peace. In the mean time I think it my indispensable duty to exert what little ability I possess in stemming the torrent of enthusiasm on the one hand, and of scepticism on the other, and in promoting the interest of truth, of candour, and of genuine evangelical religion.”

Acting upon these upright and liberal principles, Mr. Belsham continued for two years longer to fulfil the duties of his arduous office, respected by his pupils, and by all who had opportunities of witnessing the zeal, and diligence, and candour, with which he exerted himself to promote the cause of religion, truth, and virtue, and to cherish the principles of integrity, charity, and benevolence; and there never was a period when the character and reputation of the Academy stood more upon advantage ground, except in the estimation of those who could allow no merit or excellence to those who did not conform to the standard of their faith, nor adopt their peculiar modes of expression.

Though Mr. Belsham was at this time but little acquainted with Dr. Priestley, and widely differed from him on many essential points in his religious

sentiments, the reader will perceive in the following letters the expression of a truly candid and Christian spirit, and a farther proof of the strength and integrity of Mr. Belsham's mind. Indeed, through the whole of life, it is manifest how much he was influenced by the injunction which he had received in the earliest period of it, to follow truth, and to profess it without fear or disguise. See the letter of the Rev. James Belsham to his son, p. 50, and Mr. Belsham's declaration, pp. 257, 258.

Dr. PRIESTLEY to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“DEAR SIR,

“I sent you by Mr. Wilkinson a copy of my Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, and I now beg your acceptance of a copy of my Letter to Dr. Horne, &c. You will be pleased, I hope, with the manner in which I address Dr. Price, though you will not be convinced by my *arguments*. But we agree in thinking that a *Christian spirit* is of more value than even *Christian truth*. I am still disappointed with respect to the ground of the controversy, as I wish to have the *history* of the opinions discussed, and not the mere *scripture doctrine*, with respect to which nothing materially new can be advanced.

“I intended to have done myself the pleasure of spending a day with you in my way to London, but I now find it will not be convenient, on account of the coaches going through Daventry in the night.

“As your time is so fully employed, I beg you would not give yourself the trouble to answer this,

and believe me to be, with respectful compliments to your sister, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

“ J. PRIESTLEY.

“ *Birmingham, March 9th, 1787.*”

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to the Rev. Dr. PRIESTLEY.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ Though your polite and friendly attention to my numerous engagements induces you to dispense with my acknowledgment of your favour of yesterday, yet my own feelings will not excuse me from embracing the earliest opportunity of returning you my thanks for the honour you have done me in sending me your last two publications, and for the great pleasure and instruction I have already derived from the one, and which I fully expect to reap from the other.

“ I am particularly pleased with the new and clear light in which you have stated the evidences of Christianity, representing the existence and prevalence of the religion of Christ as a fact which requires a proper and adequate cause ; and with the beautiful analogy which you have pointed out between the evidences of natural and revealed religion. The notice which you have taken of what appears to me the most formidable objection against Christianity, viz. the unbelief of the majority of the Jewish nation, gave me great satisfaction. Dr. Price has likewise advanced some admirable thoughts upon the subject, in his sermons upon the resurrection of Lazarus. The remarks upon Mr. Gibbon, in connexion with that gentleman, in the Appendix to the History of the Corruptions of Christianity,

form a very complete answer to his plausible objection. I cannot help wishing that that address had been republished as an appendix to those letters, that so the whole answer to that celebrated and insidious objection might have appeared in one view.

“ I am sorry that you despair of my conversion. I cannot but flatter myself that though the case be inveterate and alarming, it is not incurable and hopeless ; and if the cure should not be accomplished, it shall not be for want of the application of proper remedies. Your former correspondence with Dr. Price opened my eyes upon the subject of Necessity, and fixed me in that system, which is my present glory. Who knows whether the present correspondence may not produce a similar effect ? But I will be serious on a serious subject.

“ I am very sure that you would not value a proselyte who should at once abandon a system of sentiments which for thirty years he had held, not only as true, but sacred, and of the highest importance, if not absolutely essential to salvation, without taking time and exerting the most solicitous attention in scrutinizing his opinions, and in forming a just and comprehensive view of religious truth. This, Sir, is precisely my case. I am far from having made up my mind upon the subject of controversy between you and your excellent friend. I profess myself a fellow-student with my pupils ; a humble, but I hope a diligent and honest inquirer after truth, willing to follow evidence whithersoever it may lead, and convinced of the indispensable duty of avowing truth at all hazards. And here, Sir, I must

acknowledge my great obligation to your writings : to them am I chiefly indebted for the high idea I entertain of the importance of truth, for whatever courage I may possess in the investigation of it, and for whatever fortitude I may feel in the avowal of it. On this account I shall ever feel myself greatly indebted to you, whether my present inquiries after truth should or should not terminate eventually in a coincidence of my sentiments with yours. I am dear Sir, very truly yours,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, March 10th, 1787.*”

The Rev. Dr. PRIESTLEY to the Rev. THOMAS
BELSHAM.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I am much obliged by your letter, expressive of that candour and liberality which have always distinguished your character, and cannot fail to do you the greatest honour. That any thing I have written should have made an impression upon such a mind, I consider as a great honour to me. I am far from wishing to make *ready converts*, as they are seldom steady ones. Besides, I never was a ready convert to any thing myself; but in general a very slow one, thinking long before I decided. Such is the nature and force of *prejudice*, especially of so long standing as yours and mine, (and we cannot help calling that *prejudice*, which prevents the reception of our present opinions,) that I shall not think the worse of Dr. Price, or of you, though you should continue Arians, notwithstanding all

the evidence I shall ever be able to bring in support of my own opinion.

“It would have given me particular pleasure to have spent a part of a day with you, and I hope I shall be able to accomplish it some time in the course of the approaching summer, but I find I cannot pay you a visit *at this time*. I shall stay, however, a week longer, in order to print the greater part of another number of the *Repository*. I have materials for nearly two numbers, and the articles are very *curious*, though you, and even my friend Mr. Lindsey, will think them rather *too bold*.—I am, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

“J. PRIESTLEY.

“*Birmingham, April 15, 1787.*”

The following extracts from Mr. Belsham's diary, though containing some repetitions, have been more freely given, that the reader may better judge of the change which was taking place in his mind, and of the manner in which he was affected by it. It will appear that, though he was sometimes apprehensive of its extent, and of the necessary consequences, he was not fully aware of the greatness of that change, till the circumstance occurred which will be mentioned in the sequel, and to which he has elsewhere referred. (See *Memoirs of the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey*, p. 290.) It must, however, have been sometimes manifested in his communications with his friends, and in his correspondence, as appears from Mr. Yates's letters to Mr. Belsham, which have been submitted to the reader. It is

certain, that before this time he had not seen any ground for that important step which he ultimately determined to take, in order to maintain his consistency and honour.

“ Jan. 20.—The goodness of God has brought me to the beginning of another year.—I have reason to review the past with great gratitude. I have been preserved in very long and hazardous journeys. I have had my wants supplied. I have received much kindness from my friends. I have prospered in my worldly affairs. I have been treated with great affection and respect. I have had my own health preserved amidst incessant care and fatigue. I have had my rational faculties continued. I have had my stock of knowledge increased. I have been instructed better in the truths of Christianity than I formerly was. I have had some pleasing seasons of devotion ; some refreshing ordinances ; some delightful sacramental Sabbaths. I have had time and space for repentance. I have entertained some good hope through grace, and amidst frequent darkness and dejection have not been thrown into absolute despair.

“ As I have met with mercies, so also with afflictions. The greatest, severest trial has been the death of my dear friend Mr. John Rickards (of Birmingham). His removal was sudden, but he was not unprepared. The shock to me was very great. We were as brothers, as David and Jonathan. Oh ! that I may follow his faith, his piety, his wisdom, and his benevolence ! I hardly ever knew so perfect a character. The death of Mrs. Clark, of Northampton, was also a great shock. I

thank God, death hath not been permitted to enter into my family, though in the case of Mr. Evans, (one of the students,) I was very apprehensive of it.

“ I have now entered upon a new year, little knowing what it shall bring forth. A great burden is laid upon me; perplexity and difficulty lie before me, but I hope God will carry me through. I fear nothing but my own heart. It is a treacherous, deceitful heart. O God, deliver me from the tyranny of sin; make my heart right in thy sight; then I dismiss all anxiety. I bid every event welcome, for all shall be over-ruled for good.”

“ Lord’s-day evening, Jan. 21.—At the sacrament, as I expected, remarkably flat, and dull, and low. I thought I could hardly have gone on. If I was at all affected, it was at the thought of drinking of the cup of Christ, and being baptized with his baptism. But I am greatly cramped and hurt by the great variety of sentiment which prevails in my family concerning Christ; and my feelings are checked by the apprehension of using unguarded expressions. In the devotional lecture I dropped some hints on the redemption of time, which I have reason to hope were well attended to and received.

“ Since I wrote last in my diary, I have spent a fortnight in London, very agreeably among my friends. I have met with much kindness and respect; more, indeed, than I felt myself entitled to; but it encourages me to endeavour to deserve it; and the good temper in which I find my young people, now that I am returned to Daventry, alleviates, in some degree, the load that oppresses my spirits.

“ Lord’s-day evening, January 28.—Jewish Antiquities occupy a great deal of my time. Instead of making a sermon, I drew up a plan of business, which, in my conscience, I thought a better employment of my time, in present circumstances. My temper has in one or two instances been ruffled, but I sometimes flatter myself that I have acquired a greater command over myself than formerly. I do not omit devotion, though I do not allow myself all the time that I ought. I have still much to do in the discipline of my mind ; so much, that I am sometimes ready to faint under the thought, yet at other times my hopes are cheerful, and I am almost triumphant in God, as my father and friend. How much am I indebted to his restraining grace !”

“ Lord’s-day evening, February 4.—I have not often been more comfortable in the pulpit than I was both parts of the day, though I began the day with great discouragement and fear, and that to such a degree, that I laid aside the sermon I intended to take, and preached an old one ; not without some suspicion, that I must in the issue resign the charge either of the Congregation, or the Academy, or both. But, upon the whole, this has been a day of much greater comfort than I could have expected ; and I have felt devotional sentiments in the pulpit and out of it, which have administered a feast, such as I have not enjoyed for many sabbaths past.”

“ Lord’s-day morning, Feb. 11.—Heard that Mr. Farmer died on Monday last, the 5th instant. I have lost a wise and excellent friend ; the Trust, a most respectable member ; and the world, and the

church, and particularly the Dissenting interest, a pious, learned, and excellent minister. He was, at this time, so very active and useful a member of the Trust, that his loss is the more to be regretted. But he is now at rest from all his labours, and in due time will receive his reward. May I often call his excellencies to mind, and learn to imitate his various and distinguished virtues !

“ I review the week with pleasure and with pain ; but, upon the whole, I cannot but encourage myself to hope, that I may in the end be accepted. If I know myself, I do love God above all things, and surely I find that divine affection grow : and love to the word, to the truth, and to the cause of Christ, surely indicate something of affection to my divine Redeemer. But still there are secret feelings, there are inward contests, that keep my mind in a state of very painful suspense.”

“ Lord’s-day evening, Feb. 18.—I have, in one or two instances, not been sufficiently upon my guard ; but I sometimes flatter myself that my temper and my heart are improving, and that truth, *that* truth which I seek after with so much earnestness, and for which I dig as for hidden treasure, has a tendency to soften my temper and purify my heart, and to raise me to a spiritual, divine, and heavenly life. If it be so I rejoice ; but with trembling do I rejoice, while I am conscious of my manifold infirmities, and know not but some spark may at once kindle those dispositions into a blaze which have heretofore destroyed my peace, and which perhaps may again do it. God forbid, that I should ever fall a sacrifice to them again !”

“ Lord’s-day evening, September 9.—I review the past week with no small uneasiness. I have not often been serious or lively in devotion, yet I have had some pleasant moments. I hover between hope and despair. I am determined to believe that God is good ; and I will not think that his dispensations towards me are unkind. I pray to be refined and purified ; but I cannot pray for severe discipline, though I fear that nothing but that will produce the proper effect. O pluck me as a brand from the burning, and exercise me with that discipline which is needful to my final salvation. I do not prescribe, I only implore mercy to pardon and grace to help. ‘ Sanctify me through thy truth ; thy word is truth.’ ”

“ Lord’s-day evening, September 16.—I learnt to-day the death of my excellent friend Mr. Cliffe, of Worcester, on Thursday last. How transient and uncertain is this dying world ! How deep would have been the wound inflicted upon me had I continued there ; yet perhaps it might have been more for my spiritual advantage. But what God has done is wise and right, and will eventually prove so—and if I am a sufferer I will bow with humble submission—the Judge of the whole earth will do justice and judgment ; why should I presume to complain, or to arraign his proceedings ?

“ Mr. Cogan left us upon Saturday morning to go to Cirencester. We were concerned at parting with him. But the changes I have passed through reconcile me almost to every thing. O that my last change may prove advantageous ! ”

“ Sunday, November 4.—In the afternoon serious

but not pathetic. At the Lord's table I *read* the introductory address, and was not so much impressed as I often am ; yet in present circumstances it is necessary to read, considering the various judgment, disposition, and taste of those who are to join in the ordinance. In the devotional lecture I was very serious, and more so than usual in the prayer at the conclusion of it. It would give me great satisfaction if I could hope that the serious and earnest advice and warning that I gave my pupils might make some valuable impression upon them ; but I often fear it is all to little purpose. It is something, however, to be in earnest in endeavours to serve them ; and I hope that God will remember me for good.

“ In the last week I have been more than once transported with unbecoming resentment upon trivial occasions. I sometimes fear there is something of disorder in it. God grant that I may be more watchful for time to come, and may be directed either to those natural or moral remedies which the case requires.”

Mr. Belsham has copied into a separate part of his diary, some forms of prayer composed at this time with a particular reference to his own circumstances. They will be interesting as devotional compositions, and from these the reader will judge of his real piety, his sincere and earnest desire to know the truth and to be guided by it, his firm determination to follow it in all its consequences, and to avow it at all hazard, and his eager aspiration after that state of mind which is produced by its beneficial influence. The Meditation which

is added, and which was composed at the close of the year, will also shew the painful and perplexing anxiety which he felt upon some important religious subjects, the unsettled and fluctuating state of his opinions, and the important change which was taking place in his sentiments, and in the manner in which he expressed them.

A MORNING PRAYER.

(March 25th.)

“Merciful God! I approach thee with reverence, with humility, and with joy. I triumph in the assurance of thine existence, of thy perfections, of thy universal providence, and of thy wise and righteous government. I am thankful that I am permitted to draw near unto thee at all times; to pour out my heart before thee, to cast my care upon thee, to implore thy favour, and in every thing, by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving, to make known my requests unto thee.

“I bless thee for the refreshing slumbers of the night, for the safety of my unguarded hours, for recruited powers of body and mind, and for the capacity which I feel of pursuing the business of life, with alacrity and vigour. How great a share of health do I enjoy, and even of spirits, notwithstanding some occasional depressions, and that in a situation so very unfavourable to both, and what reason have I to be thankful, that it is so seldom that the business of life is interrupted by sickness, or pain, or oppressive melancholy!

“I would apply to the duties of this day in de-

pendence upon thy providence, and imploring thy assistance and thy blessing. May I engage in the business of life with ardour and resolution, remembering that life is short ; that death, judgment, and eternity are fast approaching, and that the judge is nigh, even at the door ; reflecting, likewise, with regret and shame, how large a portion of life has been consumed in vanity, indolence, and dissipation.

“ May I apply to the discovery of truth with a humble, candid, impartial mind. May I dig for it as for hidden treasure. May I set a just value upon it. May I appreciate aright the proportionate importance of the several truths which are the objects of inquiry. May I apply with the greatest diligence to those which are of the greatest practical importance. Make me willing to embrace truth wherever I find it ; and may I never be afraid or ashamed upon every proper occasion to avow it ; and do thou assist me in forming a just judgment when such occasions do occur, that on the one hand, I may not ‘ cast pearls before swine,’ nor unnecessarily offend the prejudices of the weakest Christian ; and on the other, that I may not be ashamed of Christ and his words, and may never meanly desert the cause of truth, through fear of any temporal inconvenience to which the honest and courageous profession of it may expose me.

“ How numerous are the prejudices to which I am exposed ; how difficult is it to be aware of them, and to fortify myself against them ! Do thou deliver me, I beseech thee, from the prejudices of education, of fashion, of novelty, of pride and

vanity, of self-interest, and from every other improper bias of mind, however unknown and unsuspected. O Lord, I can appeal to thee to attest the sincerity with which I desire to divest my mind of its prejudices, and to understand, embrace, and profess the genuine truths of the gospel of Christ.

“ I hope that the views with which I pursue truth will bear the scrutiny of thy observation. I trust I can appeal to thee, that I do not take all this pains merely to gratify a vain curiosity, nor to acquire fame, nor to secure any worldly advantage. I hope I can appeal to thee, that thou knowest it is my earnest desire to form just apprehensions of religious truth, that I may enjoy its cheering, sanctifying power ; that I may yield thee a more rational and a more acceptable service, and that I may be able to lead those who are committed to my care, into the paths of wisdom, truth and life.

“ O keep thy servant from all gross and dangerous mistakes. O suffer me not to wander in the labyrinths of error and delusion ; at least, let not my mistakes prove injurious to my virtue and my peace. ‘ If I take up any deadly thing, suffer it not to hurt me.’ Yet, if I might presume to ask it, O clear up the mists that hang upon my mind, and lead thy servant into the knowledge of all useful and necessary truth.

“ O God, I know not how my present researches will terminate, and I feel great anxiety, at times, with respect to my future prospects in life ; but let not this consideration have an undue influence upon my mind. May I steadily adhere to truth and duty, and leave it to my heavenly Father

to provide for me in future life in that way which to his unerring wisdom shall appear the most expedient. I am ashamed when I reflect upon my want of faith in God, after so many years' experience of his goodness and parental care. How wonderfully has he appeared in my behalf, and how often has he been better to me than all my fears ! ' Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me ? Trust thou in God, for I will yet praise him.'

" If I am called to suffer in the cause of truth ; if I incur the censure of my friends and the reproach of the world, for what I apprehend to be the faithful discharge of my duty ; if I am obliged to resign connexions and employments which are honourable and advantageous, and to retire to silence and obscurity, let me not repine. May I esteem it an honour to suffer in the cause of my divine Master ; and may I ever hold myself in readiness to forsake all for Christ. ' May none of these things move me, neither let me count my life dear unto me, so that I may finish my course with joy.'

" I bless God for those important truths with which I am acquainted, and in the belief of which I am firmly established. I would not, for the whole world, let go my persuasion of the existence, the perfections, the providence, and the government of God, the truth of the gospel, and the hope of salvation by Jesus Christ. O that I may value these truths highly, and that I may daily experience more and more their enlightening, cheering, sanctifying influence.

" Teach me to communicate instruction to my

pupils in the most engaging and useful manner. O that I might be able to inspire them with an ardent love of religious truth, with indefatigable diligence and zeal in the investigation of it: that I might teach them to be humble, candid, and impartial in their inquiries, and that they may be diffident of their own judgment; fearless in the avowal of what they judge to be the truth of the gospel, but very tender and candid to others who may differ from them. O that they might be trained up to wisdom, to humility, to learning, to genuine Christianity, to honour and usefulness in this world, and to eternal happiness beyond the grave.

“Keep me this day out of the way of temptation. Let me not mispend my time; let me not indulge vain and foolish thoughts and affections; let me not be intemperate in my diet; let me not give way to unbecoming transports of resentment. Keep my heart from pride, from envy, from malice, from revenge, and from covetousness.

“Let me do the business of this day in the day. Let me not neglect to visit the sick and the poor. Teach me to address them in an instructive, edifying, and consolatory manner. Grant me a calm, composed, cheerful frame of mind. Preserve me from every real external injury. Supply all my wants. Keep me out of the way of temptation; cleanse me from every secret fault; hold me back from presumptuous sins, and enliven me with the consolations of thy gospel and the light of thy countenance; and bring me to the close of the day in health, cheerfulness, and peace.

“Bless all my friends; protect their persons;

supply their wants, preserve them from evil ; smile upon their lawful undertakings ; make them truly religious and truly happy.

“ Remember those who desire an interest in my prayers. Pity my afflicted friends ; heal those that are sick ; look upon their affliction and their pain, and forgive all their sins. Spare amiable and useful lives, and prepare for their great change those who are appointed to die.

“ Assist and bless ministers of all descriptions, and grant success to thy word which they dispense. O that truth, and piety, and Christian charity may universally prevail. ‘ May thy kingdom come, and thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.’

“ Forgive all my sins. Grant me genuine and permanent repentance. Accept my feeble services. Forget not to grant what I forget to ask. Prepare me for every event. Guide me by thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.

“ I offer up these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, and in dependance upon thy infinite mercy, exercised through his mediation and intercession. Through him, I ascribe unto thee, O Father, the kingdom, the power, and the glory, now and evermore. Amen.

AN EVENING PRAYER.*

(April 1st.)

“ O Lord God, I am thankful for the mercies of this day ; for the continuance of my life, my health,

* This prayer concludes with intercessions for the family, for his friends, &c., similar to those already given, though more expressive of his concern for the temporal and spiritual interest of those whom he bore in remembrance in these devotional exercises.

my ease, my limbs, my faculties, my bodily senses, my moral powers, my capacity and opportunities for study and improvement, my peace of mind, my desire after truth, the pleasure I find in the investigation of it, the benign influence which it has upon the heart ; for kind friends, and for all the kindness I meet with from them ; for fortitude to bear unkindness, and especially if I feel any disposition to forgive it, and not to resent it too highly, nor to cherish a spirit of revenge. I thank thee for what I know of thyself ; for the high, adoring thoughts I entertain of thee ; that I do not consider thee as a gloomy tyrant, but as a God of love ; that I cannot but look upon all thy dispensations as the product of infinite wisdom and goodness, and this thought is an inexhaustible source of consolation, and administers continual refreshment and delight.

“ I confess my sins before thee with humility, contrition, and genuine repentance. I am ashamed that I am not more humble, more pure, more temperate, more benevolent, more devout. I am ashamed that my appetites should be with such difficulty restrained within the bounds of reason, and that my passions are not under stricter discipline. I lament that little things are so apt to ruffle and discompose my mind ; and that I too often fret, and speak unguardedly, and with greater warmth and acrimony than the occasion requires or justifies. I wonder and blush that I do not better love to converse with thee, that I cannot find more time to spend with my God, and that when I am engaged in social prayer my thoughts so often wander, and that it is so very seldom in social or in secret wor-

ship that my heart and affections are so warm and lively as they ought to be.

“ O merciful God, pardon all my numerous and aggravated transgressions. Create within me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me. Impart thy mercy in the way which thou hast appointed through the mediation of Jesus Christ. As far as I understand the gospel, I admire and value it. I hope there is nothing in the world that I prefer to an interest in its blessings. I hope that I sincerely love and venerate its divine author, and that there is nothing in the world that I would not willingly do and submit to in order to prove my fidelity to Christ, for whose sake I count all things as loss.

“ Watch over me this night ; preserve me from every disquieting alarm ; keep my habitation from the devouring flame ; protect me from the sons of violence. Let me not sleep the sleep of death. Refresh me with pleasing and undisturbed repose, and raise me in the morning fitted and disposed for the duties of the returning day.”

The anniversary of Mr. Belsham's birth-day, April 26th, gave occasion to the following reflections and grateful acknowledgments :

“ I have this day completed my 37th year. Goodness and mercy have attended me. Wonderful has been the conduct of Divine Providence respecting me. How gently have I been conducted by the hand through difficulties and dangers ! How kindly have the trials with which I have been exercised been proportioned to my strength ! How

mercifully has my unworthy life been spared, while those who were wiser, and better, and more useful than I, have been taken away !

When in this vale of tears I backward look,
And miss such numbers, numbers too, of such
Firmer in health, and greener in their age,
And stricter on their guard, and fitter far
To play life's subtle game, I scarce believe
I still survive.

YOUNG'S *Night Thoughts*.

“ O Lord, I cannot express my gratitude for all thy mercies, so rich, so various, so seasonable, so suitable. Continue thy fatherly indulgence. O place me in circumstances that may be favourable to my virtue and my peace. O Lord, I would resolve to flee from temptation. Do thou second and support, and render effectual these necessary resolutions. I would resolve to be diligent, serious, impartial, calm, pure, holy, humble, devout, and benevolent, obedient to thy commands, and resigned to thy disposal. I would resolve to be more assiduous in the performance of my duty, as a head of a family, as a minister, as a tutor, as a friend ; and in every relation and department of life. Fortify me by thy grace ; arm me with vigour ; furnish me with wisdom ; gird me with strength ; say unto me, ‘ Fear not, for I am with thee.’

“ Prepare me for the events of the year upon which I am entering. Teach me to follow the guidance of thy providence, to acquiesce in thy disposals. If prosperity is appointed, let me bear it with equanimity ; if adversity, let me submit to it with fortitude and resignation. If life be continued, let it be devoted to thee, and be employed wholly

in thy service ; if death is to overtake me, O prepare me for the awful change. Whether I live may I live to the Lord, or whether I die may I die in the Lord ; whether I live or die may I be ever thine. Amen.”

The following extracts are from a Prayer for the Lord’s-day evening (Oct. 14th).

“ Blessed God, permit me this evening once more to approach thee and to offer up my humble address at the throne of grace in the name of Jesus Christ, and in dependance upon thy infinite mercy, exercised through his mediation and intercession.

“ I bless thee for the renewed opportunity which I have this day enjoyed of attending upon the ordinances of religion. O that I may have a due sense of the value of these privileges, and of the improvement which may justly be expected from me.

“ I humbly pray that the religious exercises which I have this day conducted may be a means of promoting a spirit of humility, purity, and genuine devotion ; of penitence and contrition, of contentment and cheerful confidence in God in my own breast, and that the same good effects may be produced in the hearts of those who joined in these exercises, notwithstanding the many imperfections which attended the services, both in them and me. If I have been affectionate, enlarged, lively, and serious, I would be thankful ; if I have been cold, wandering, flat, and languid, I would reflect upon it with concern ; and if it has been owing to natural infirmity, I beg of God to accept the willing spirit, though the flesh is weak ; if it has been

owing to a hard and corrupt heart, I implore forgiveness and reformation.

“ If I have this day delivered any erroneous and pernicious doctrine, God grant that it may not be followed by any bad effect either upon myself or my hearers. Enlighten my benighted mind, and teach me the truth as it is in Jesus. May the truths which have been the subjects of this day’s meditation make a deep impression both upon my own heart and upon the hearts of my hearers. Follow the instructions of thy word with thy efficacious blessing, which will crown the feeblest efforts to serve the interests of truth and religion with success. May the discoveries of thy word enlighten the understanding, impress the heart, awaken the conscience, abide in the memory, and govern the temper and conduct both of the speaker and the hearers, and let us not be ‘as a man who, after having beheld his face in a glass, goeth away, and forgetteth what manner of man he was.’ ”

A MEDITATION.

(*Nov. 11th.*)

“ The Son of God died. He came into the world to die ; to give his life as a ransom. This was determined by the Father, and he was actually slain. Why was this great sacrifice offered ? Why was the blood of the Son of God spilt ? Was it to pacify the Father’s wrath ? The thought is absurd and blasphemous. Was it to pay the debt which sinners owe to divine justice, and which they cannot pay themselves ? What is the meaning of these figurative expressions, and where is this strange

doctrine taught? He died as a sacrifice for sin. 'He was made sin,' that is, a sin-offering for us, 'who knew no sin.' He died to shew that death was the desert of sin. But did not the death of all mankind demonstrate this? He died to exhibit an affecting view of the evil of sin, and of the displeasure of God against it. If so, this event does not operate upon me as it ought; for I do not feel myself so much impressed with the evil of sin on this account, as by considering the unhappy change which it introduces into the mind; how it debases and degrades the rational powers, and entails dishonour, and death, and misery, upon all who practise it. Have I mistaken the end of the Redeemer's sufferings; or is it said that he died to exhibit the evil of sin? Or is it that I have not attended sufficiently to it in this view, that I am so little affected with it? Why did he die? Was it to prove the doctrine of the resurrection? But was not that proved by his miracles? I do indeed see a propriety and wisdom in his resurrection from the dead, that he might be the first-fruits of them who slept; but surely this was not the only end which the death of Christ was intended to answer? He himself teaches, that he came to give his life a ransom for sinners. The apostle declares, that we have redemption through his blood, even the remission of sins; and that by his stripes we are healed; by his obedience we are made righteous. I cannot comprehend this. I feel myself confounded. The death of Christ seems principally intended to answer purposes that I should not have thought needful; or rather, that I do not and cannot understand.

Perhaps it is intended that we should not perfectly understand it. This may be reserved for the discovery of a future world. We shall then know the love of God and of Christ, which here surpasses knowledge. But why is so much said upon the subject if it cannot be comprehended? As an example, I perceive and admire that constellation of virtues which crowned the suffering Redeemer—his fortitude in the cause of truth and righteousness—his courageous avowal of the truth, which he knew would cost him his life—his perfect resignation in the alarming prospect—his dignity—his meekness—his forgiving spirit—his faith in God. Here I feel myself transported with wonder, veneration, and love. In this view I feel its powerful, sanctifying influence. But is this the Scripture doctrine of atonement? O teach me, blessed Redeemer, in what light I am to consider thy death, and lead me into those views of this interesting event which shall have the best practical influence. If Christ died only as an example, why is not greater stress laid upon this circumstance; and why was so much stress laid upon other views of his sufferings, which seem of quite a different kind? My mind is bewildered. I earnestly, and, I hope, honestly search after truth, but I am lost in the labyrinth of error.”

It was near the close of the session of 1786 that a circumstance occurred of no trifling importance in itself, and which was the cause of great anxiety to Mr. Belsham, but in reference to which he manifested his usual firmness, discretion, and candour, judging and acting as he did from his own convictions at the time, and from a sense of the obligation

under which he lay, from his connexion with Mr. Coward's Trustees, to support their injunctions and requisitions, at least as far as respected the students who received assistance from the funds at their disposal.

The reader has already learnt from the account given of the discipline and business of the Academy (p. 225), that every candidate for the Christian ministry, from the commencement of his second year, was required to take his turn in prayer in the family in an evening ; and from the commencement of his third year, to take his turn to pray in the pulpit on the Lord's-day evening, previous to the delivery of the sermon. In the performance of this service, as was the general practice of Dissenters, the persons engaged in it made use of their own form of words to express those devotional feelings which the occasion and circumstances called forth, either trusting to their power of clothing their thoughts in suitable language as they arose in their minds at the moment, or arranging them by meditation and committing them to paper, and afterwards to memory. To the generality of young men, however pious and serious their dispositions might be, or how much soever they had been accustomed to this method in private devotion, it was a formidable effort, in a large family, and in the presence of their tutors and senior fellow-students to attempt this exercise. There were those in the several classes of students who were called upon to engage in it, who felt that it would be a considerable relief to them to compose their prayers and read them from their own manuscript ; but this was discou-

raged by Mr. Belsham, on the ground that such a practice was contrary to the usage of the institution, would not be allowed by the Trustees, nor tolerated by Dissenting congregations, among whom it had always been the custom of their ministers to pray extempore, or at least memoriter. The injunction to comply with the established custom soon began to wear the appearance of an imposition, and there were some who made a point of exercising that liberty in this respect which they thought they ought to claim, and should be allowed to every one in a matter of so much seriousness and importance, contending that an address to the Supreme Being ought not to be a mere exercise of mental ability, or subject, further than was unavoidable, to that distraction of mind which must be produced by first efforts to conduct the social worship of a family or a congregation. The students, who were of this opinion, thought proper to address the Trustees upon this subject, and signified their intention to Mr. Belsham in the following terms, by one of their number.

“ SIR,

“ I inclose a copy of the address (to the Trustees), and am desirous to thank you for having interested yourself so much in this affair. We are all sorry if it has given you any uneasiness, or in the least retarded your more useful employments, but we hope for the happiest consequences to you, to ourselves, and to the world. We think it our duty thus to express our gratitude to our tutor, not only for his assistance but for his concurrence in our

proceedings. As you wished this letter (to the Trustees) to pass through your hands, we will be obliged to you if you will inclose it, as you think proper, and send it by the first opportunity, for we trust the matter has been so thoroughly discussed, that the address will need no further alteration ; assuring you, Sir, that it meets with the entire and final approbation of every one who has signed it, and especially of your faithful pupil,

“ ———— .

“ *May 12, 1787.*”

Mr. Belsham had thought it right to apprise the Trustees of the intentions of the students, which he did in the following letter, addressed to one of that body :

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I was in great hope, that what I had advanced to the gentlemen upon the subject of forms of prayer, and after having read an extract from your letter, as expressing the sense of the Trustees upon the subject, that the business would have been dropped.—But I find that the advocates for written forms mean to address the Trustees upon the subject, pleading conscience, and requesting leave to act according to their own judgment in this case. They know my opinion upon the subject. But it is a question upon which I do not consider myself as authorized to decide. It is, therefore, with my entire concurrence that they have made the present application to the Trust. It appears to me to be an affair of great delicacy and importance. The reputation, the usefulness, and the very exist-

ence of the institution appear to be at stake.—I hope that the gentlemen will pay that attention to it which its magnitude deserves, and that they will adopt that rule of conduct which will be most conducive to the interests of true virtue and piety, and to the success of this institution, so far as it may be subservient to these important ends. I have only to request with the greatest earnestness, that no friendly regard to my interest as an individual, which is a thing not worthy of a moment's consideration on the present occasion, may have the least influence upon the decision of the Trust, in a case which is fraught with such extensive and important consequences to the Dissenting cause. With respectful compliments to your brethren in the Trust, I remain, your and their obedient servant,

“ T. BELSHAM.

“*Daventry, May 11, 1787.*”

It appears from an official letter now before the present writer, dated May 26th, 1787, that, at a meeting of the Trustees, it was unanimously resolved, “That it is not consistent with the plan of education adopted by Mr. Coward's Trustees, that any student under their care and patronage should use written forms of prayer, in the public worship of the family; and that Mr. Paice do inform Mr. Belsham hereof, that he may communicate it to the parties subscribing the letter.”

This resolution was, in fact, a law for the Academy; for to have allowed the students upon their own foundation the privilege of written forms would have been an invidious distinction, and productive

of divisions and uneasiness in the family, which would soon have terminated in the ruin of the institution. This resolution was communicated to the students, and as the close of the session was at hand, it was understood that those of them who returned after the vacation, would do so with an intention of complying with the requisition. The petitioners were obliged to acquiesce, but this was not done without a renewed effort to obtain their object in the following year, with the same want of success. It would be foreign to the subject of this Memoir to detail the particulars of this altercation ; but it is a curious fact, that almost all the students who contended for this privilege, and some who did not sign the address to the Trustees, actually did use their own written forms of prayer in conducting the religious services of the congregations in which they soon afterwards officiated, and were at least tolerated in so doing ; and Mr. Belsham himself, at a more distant period, adopted the practice, and acknowledged that he found great relief and benefit from it, though he had long been accustomed to extempore prayer, and had acquired great ease, fluency, and variety of thought and expression in conducting it. When the Trustees confirmed their resolution, some of the students very unadvisedly made their appeal to that part of the Dissenting public with which they were to be connected, in a printed letter, which was very widely circulated, and very generally censured ; but which, however faulty it might be, either in the sentiments which it contained, or in the manner of publishing them, was not attended with those injurious effects which

were predicted ; partly because the public are always disposed to view the conduct of the young with indulgence, and partly because the liberal Dissenters were more prepared to admit such a change in the mode of conducting their religious services than the existing race of ministers imagined. The following extract from a letter of Mr. Belsham to the Trustees, dated June 4, 1788, on this subject, is perhaps due to the character of the students, who took the most decided and active part in this controversy, and will, at the same time, afford a specimen of the judicious and affectionate manner in which Mr. Belsham treated and regarded his pupils :

“ With respect to forms of prayer I must own, that I am very apprehensive that Mr. Coward’s Trustees take up the matter in a light too unfavourable to the young people. I am perfectly convinced that the application made to the Trustees for the repeal of their last year’s resolution did not originate in disrespect, indolence, or irreligion ; for those who have the greatest respect for the Trustees, and who think themselves under the greatest obligation to them, as well as those who are most diligent, most serious, and most attached to free prayer, concurred in it. They are in an error ; but, with regard to most of them, it is an error of the head, not of the heart. Their argument is plausible, not to say unanswerable—‘ You allow us to inquire whether forms or free prayer are most eligible, but you do not allow us to act upon our conviction. This appears an inconsistency. To tell them in reply, that their objections against free

prayer originate in indolence and irreligion, has certainly a greater tendency to exasperate than to convince. They ask relief from what they think a grievance either to themselves or their brethren, and I own I see no great harm in this, and I can assure the Trustees that their application was not intentionally disrespectful. Though the Trustees had forbidden forms of prayer the year before, they thought it not impossible, that upon reconsideration they might alter their mind. There is, therefore, upon the whole, I think, no reason for severe censure, or for withholding from any student any favour which he would otherwise have received. The Trustees may very properly reply, The object of our Trust is, to supply Dissenting congregations with ministers, but Dissenters will not allow their ministers the use of written forms of prayer. Candidates for the ministry must learn to pray without them ; if, therefore, you choose to accept of our exhibitions, or to be educated in our college, you must submit to these restrictions.—Here they stand upon firm ground, and will, I think, justify themselves to all the world. My only wish is, that the Trustees may act with firmness without resentment, and that they may not impute to the young men motives which they disavow, nor think worse of them than they really deserve. The whole of this controversy has its foundation in a principle which does the highest credit to the Trust, and to the institution, viz., the encouragement given to freedom of inquiry. Young men, if allowed to inquire, will think, and judge, and speak, and act for themselves, and will sometimes differ from their seniors

in opinion, and will carry matters to a greater length than those that are older and wiser can approve. Put a stop to freedom of inquiry, and I will engage for it, that the Trustees will never be troubled with petitions and remonstrances. But would they wish to purchase peace at so dear a price?

“As to the printed letter, nothing can be said in vindication of it, and could the persons concerned in it be discovered, I think Mr. Coward’s Trustees would be fully justified in dismissing them from the Academy. As the matter now stands, I cannot help expressing my most earnest wish and hope, that they will take no manner of notice of an anonymous libel. I should be very sorry that the persons who drew it up, who I believe were few in number, and will not return to the Academy again, should have the satisfaction of knowing that it gave one moment’s uneasiness to any one member of the Trust. It will answer two very valuable ends, which the good-natured inditers of it did not intend. In the first place, ninety-nine persons in a hundred will applaud the conduct of the Trustees; and, in the second place, it will notify, in a much more public manner than could otherwise have been done, that candidates for the ministry at Daventry Academy are not allowed to read their prayers.

“I thought it my duty, upon the present occasion, to state my sentiments with plainness and freedom, and shall be happy if they meet with the approbation of the Trustees.”

The following extract from a letter, dated May 2,

1788, addressed to Mr. Belsham by the Rev. Thomas Urwick, affords such evidence of the good feeling and good disposition of the writer, who was at that time one of Mr. Coward's Trustees, that it ought not to be suppressed. Referring to letters, which had been received from the students at Daventry, he observes, "Upon what I have seen I would only say, that I much lament that I have no opportunity of being in company with them, for they would soon be convinced, that they have in the Trustees nothing more than candid friends and indulgent seniors in the same ministry with that for which they are training. I am sure they will readily permit us to fulfil our Trust in a conscientious regard to that interest for which the money was bequeathed; and we are honest men only as we favour a mode of education that we think essential or most favourable to the support of that interest. And if they will permit us this, which I am confident they do, they may assure themselves that we shall be glad to meet or prevent every wish of their minds."

The situation of the Academy at Daventry had always appeared to Mr. Belsham unfavourable to the interests of the institution, and he had made repeated efforts to induce the Trustees to remove it to a more eligible one. The resignation of the Rev. James Kettle, minister of the congregation at Warwick, afforded an opportunity of removing it thither, as there was just reason to expect that Mr. Belsham would be invited to succeed him, if Mr. Coward's Trustees were favourable to the design. The expense necessarily attending the accomplish-

ment of such a scheme was indeed a serious obstacle to the adoption of it; but, as afterwards appeared, not an insurmountable one; for on Mr. Belsham's resignation the Academy was removed to Northampton, and subsequently has been established at Wymondely, in Hertfordshire. The Trustees, doubtless, had reasons for their decision, which were satisfactory to themselves, but in this instance were disinclined to Mr. Belsham's proposal. From an official letter, dated April 9th, 1788, it appears, "That the Trustees having taken the proposal into serious and deliberate consideration, were unanimously of opinion, that the removal of their academical institution to Warwick is a measure which they have not sufficient encouragement to approve."

This was evidently a great disappointment to Mr. Belsham, though he endeavours to acquiesce in the determination of the Trustees. The following extract from his letter to them shews, that he was not satisfied: "April 18th, 1788. I am much obliged by your favour of the 9th instant. I own, that I rather expected the gentlemen of the Trust would have paid a little more attention to the proposal concerning Warwick. I beg leave to assure them, that it is not caprice, but a permanent and growing conviction of the judgment, superior to the consideration of interest, and even to that vis inertiae, that fixity, as Dr. Priestley calls it, of the human constitution, (which in the middle of life renders a person averse to novelty of situation and connexions,) which induces me to wish for a removal from Daventry; and all the true friends of

the Academy, so far as I have had opportunity of consulting them, have thought that either Warwick, or some place in Warwickshire, would be, as a central place, and in the vicinity of friends, an eligible situation for the institution. I know of no particular objection against Warwick, except, that it is twenty miles further from London, and no thoroughfare, and that there is no house ready to receive us ; the latter, which is the most important, I thought that I had in some measure obviated. But though what I have advanced upon this business is the result of my own convictions, and though Mr. Coward's Trustees cannot be surprised if I act upon these convictions, I ought not to expect, nor do I desire, that they should deviate from their own apprehension of propriety to accede to any proposals from me, and I shall be perfectly satisfied with the resolution of the Trust, whatever be the ultimate issue with respect to myself."

The following extracts require no comment ; and every friend of truth, who has experienced the perplexity and indecision which sometimes attend the most earnest and diligent researches after it, and the difficulty of attaining satisfactory evidence, will truly sympathize with the subject of these memoirs in the anxiety which he felt in pursuing his inquiries, and in the anticipation of the result, should they terminate, as Mr. Belsham expected, in the adoption of sentiments so unpopular as those which finally approved themselves to his judgment, and which, when his convictions were established, he so ably and fearlessly advocated.

"Lord's-day evening, Jan. 20.—Since I last wrote

in my diary I have spent a fortnight in London. I staid some days longer than I intended, to settle my trust with Mr. Jennings, and the business of the Academy with Mr. Coward's Trustees. As it was the most important, so it would have been the most pleasant journey I ever made to London, had not my pleasure been interrupted by intelligence of Mr. Edwards's *illness of a putrid fever, and my sister and Mr. Reynell having taken the infection. I thank God they are now recovering fast.

“The events of the new year I leave to the direction of infinite wisdom. I hope I can say I *do not*—I am sure I can say, I *would not*—indulge an anxious thought, though my situation is interesting and perplexing, and my prospects rather gloomy. But, O Lord, thy will be done, and teach me to submit and to acquiesce. O Lord, lead me not into temptation. Let me not this year add to the number of my sins. Let this year, and the whole of future life, whether longer or shorter, be spent in innocence and peace. Teach me to keep my heart with diligence, and to live continually under a powerful, practical sense of the presence and inspection of God, and the solemn account I must shortly give at his tribunal. Suffer no temptation to attack me that shall be too hard for me, and hold me up in the arms of unchangeable faithfulness and love.”

The disorder which prevailed in the family, though in some instances alarming, did not prove fatal to any of the members of it. The writer well remembers the anxiety and distress it occasioned, and the

* Afterwards minister at Birmingham, first as colleague of Mr. Jones, and finally as sole pastor of the congregation.

kind attention, sympathy, and good feeling, which were manifested by the students towards each other Mr. Belsham was among the number of those who suffered from visiting the patients in their illness.

The following is Mr. Belsham's account of the manner in which he was affected by it :

“ My disorder attacked me quite suddenly and unexpectedly, and for a time was very violent. It was a disorder, which of all sicknesses I most dreaded, and from which I thought myself least likely to recover. But He that brought me low, has thought fit to raise me up ; and while, on the one hand, he has humbled me by the rebuke of his rod, on the other hand, he has encouraged my confidence in him for deliverance from dangers, that appeared the most threatening and alarming. O my soul, wait thou upon God, for all my expectation is from him.

“ I desire to learn wisdom from the discipline of affliction ;—the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, the precariousness of life, the uncertainty of health, the value of the Divine favour, submission to the will of God, preparation for all events, and a prevailing concern to work the work of him that sent me, to fulfil the duties of the post assigned me, and to work out my salvation with fear and trembling.

“ My fever was very high, and I am not sure, that my life was not in danger. I felt anxious in the prospect of appearing at the tribunal of my God and Judge. I entertained, however, a prevailing hope of mercy. O may I so live for time to come, that when this solemn scene shall return, and I shall lie upon a dying bed, all doubts may be

dispelled, and I may be able to look forward to immortality with joy and triumph, in humble dependence upon the mercy of God through Jesus Christ.”

The following prayer was composed on recovery from this illness, Feb. 24th :

“O my God, I thank thee for this seasonable affliction, for I know, it is if need be we are in heaviness, and that thou dost not willingly grieve nor afflict the children of men.

“I thank thee that this chastisement has been so short, so light, and attended with so many alleviating circumstances. In the midst of judgment thou hast remembered mercy, and hast chastened me less, O how much less, than my iniquities deserved. I bless thee for recovering health. O suffer not the clouds to return after the rain. Restore me to my former vigour, and let renewed life and health be devoted more than ever to thy service.

“O lead me into the wise improvement of the discipline of thy providence. Teach me to stand in awe of thee, and at the same time to confide in thee in the darkest season. Let me never forget, that nothing is too hard for God, and that while I am under his protection I am safe and happy, and no real evil can approach me. O let affliction imbitter sin, and engage me to form the most steadfast resolution to abhor and depart from that which is evil, and to cleave to that which is good. Let me learn to resign myself to thee ; to do the work of every day in its day ; to improve life, and health, and time, and to live in such a manner, that death, when it overtakes me, may be no surprise or terror

to me. Let affliction endear the word and promises of God. May I study it with greater attention and diligence, receive its truth, imbibe its spirit, and triumph in its consolations.

“Finally, form me to a sympathetic spirit with my suffering brethren. Teach me to weep with those that weep; to contribute all in my power to alleviate distress, and to administer to others the same consolations and supports, the efficacy of which I have myself experienced. And now unto Him who is able to keep me from falling, and to present me faultless in the presence of his glory, to the only wise God, my saviour, be glory, honour, and thanksgiving, for ever. Amen.”

Subjoined to the original is the following memorandum: “June 14th. I have not yet recovered the health, vigour, and spirits I enjoyed before my late illness.

“I have not made that wise improvement of it which I ought, and which I expected to have done. I am often ready to doubt, whether I am at all the better for the discipline I have passed through.”

“Lord’s-day evening March. 2.—This is the first sabbath that I have been able to preach since the 3d of February. I have been brought low, but God hath helped me, therefore to the shadow of his wings will I resort. I made a sermon on the benefit derived from affliction. I was a good deal affected, my spirits being very low, and my strength very small. It was sacrament day. I had the whole of the service written down, and I was tolerably serious.”

“Sunday evening, March 9th.—I am low and

weak, and speak with considerable difficulty; but the devotional exercises of the day have been very pleasant, particularly the morning prayer. But what, alas! is the advantage of this, when I feel that I have very little profited by the discipline of affliction, and that with returning health, the same feelings, the same dispositions and temper are likewise returning; and the same incapacity, or rather disinclination, to resistance? I have no safety but in flight, and upon that I am now almost fully determined, and the thoughts of it continually occupy my mind, and fill me with anxiety and distress. I must take a step, the consequence of which will be of the utmost importance to the whole of my future life. But duty calls, and I must follow.”

“Sunday evening, March 16th.—The kindness of Providence is very great; I am much indebted to preventing grace. O that the discipline I have sustained, and from which I am far from being completely recovered, even now, may have its proper effect! God forbid it should be quite lost upon me.

“I feel a growing dissatisfaction with my present situation upon many accounts, and am come almost to a fixed determination not to remain here longer than another year.”

“Lord’s-day evening, June 8.—My mind has been agitated this week on account of the controversy concerning forms of prayer, and the unwise, unhandsome conduct of the young men, who have printed a letter upon the subject, and circulated it through the kingdom. I have more than once been betrayed into uncommon warmth, and I feel sensa-

tions sometimes which give me great alarm. The prospect that lies before me is very dark and melancholy, but I hope I shall have wisdom to discern, and fortitude and resolution enough to discharge, my duty, and leave the event to God."

"Lord's-day evening, June 15.—In this week the vacation commenced. I have been hurried. Our circumstances are peculiar. Several of the family leave on account of the prohibition of forms of prayer. My valedictory oration was chiefly upon that subject. Never was more affected than in the concluding prayer. But, alas! I find that exercises of devotion are no sure preservative from sin. O when shall I obtain a complete victory over myself! Am I always to live in a state of internal war? May I never hope to be released from the bondage in which I am enthralled?

"Stretch out thine arm, victorious King,
And my remaining sin subdue."

"Sunday evening, September 7th.—Yesterday I was prevented from making a new sermon, and I preached one that had been made some years ago. It was upon Arian principles, and the expressions were strong; my own mind at the time of delivering the sermon full of doubts; besides which, my spirits were much depressed. The discourse at the Lord's table having been drawn up this afternoon, contained nothing inconsistent with my fixed principles. Indeed, I did not know that I had insensibly so far deviated from the principles I held a few years ago. My mind is in continual anxiety concerning my situation here. I wish to resign my connexion with the congregation, but I know not how. I

look up to the providence of God for direction. I sincerely wish that I may be able to discern my duty and to act up to it. In the evening I was lively and affected. The subject, the insufficiency of natural arguments to prove the reality of a future state. The more I think of it the more I am convinced, that no reasoning could satisfy an inquisitive mind upon this subject without revelation. This gives dignity and value to the gospel dispensation. This it is that makes Christ and his gospel truly precious. O that I may truly value them, and live up to my principles and profession !”

“Sunday evening, October 5th.—Morning, Mr. Forsaith* preached from Luke xix. 10: ‘For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.’ I was exceedingly uncomfortable. The doctrine which was delivered exceedingly shocked my judgment and my feelings.—In the week I had little true comfort, not from loss of time, but want of devotion and difficulty of governing my temper. I had much interesting conversation on Wednesday with Mr. Kenrick concerning the revolution in my sentiments and duties incumbent upon it. I have almost taken my resolution, and my mind is nearly made up to it.”

“November 5th.—I preached a sermon upon the Revolution, and in the family upon the value of Truth.

“I have been protected in journeying, and have had some pleasing and improving interviews with

* This gentleman succeeded Mr. Cogan as Classical Tutor; he was professedly very orthodox, and used the strong language in which the doctrines of Trinitarians are usually expressed.

my friends. I wish conscience could bear testimony to the uniform propriety of my temper and conduct. I have had many anxious thoughts concerning my purposed removal; but the more I consider, the more I am convinced of the propriety of it."

"Lord's-day evening, December 28th.—The services of the day have been serious and pleasant. Enlarged in prayer, this afternoon, reflecting upon the difficult and perplexing scene that lies before me. If I know myself, I act under a strong sense of duty, and I trust in Providence to direct and support me."

. There are no other documents in the possession of the writer of this Memoir, which indicate that Mr. Belsham communicated to any of his friends the state of his mind, or his intention of resigning the situation which he held at Daventry, till very near the time that he intended to do so. Indeed, it was a case which so much depended upon his own views and feelings, that it could not be judged of by others. In the beginning of the year 1789, when writing to his old and esteemed friend the Rev. Samuel Palmer, he confidentially intimated to him his difficulties, and stated what he considered to be his duty, in the circumstances in which he was placed; and Mr. Palmer was so fully convinced of the great utility and advantage of his services, and of the difficulty of providing a successor, equally qualified and equally acceptable, that at first he endeavoured to dissuade him from his purpose, though shortly after, in a second letter, upon more deliberate consideration, and foreseeing the consequences of Mr. Belsham's retaining his situa-

tion, when the change in his theological sentiments was known, he coincided with Mr. Belsham in the necessity of acting upon his own convictions, and communicating his design to Mr. Coward's Trustees, and, at a proper season, to the members of the congregation. With that decision which marked his character, Mr. Belsham pursued the straight line of duty, which his deliberate judgment and well-regulated conscience dictated, and it was very shortly publicly known, that at the close of the session the important trust which he held would be consigned to other hands.

Mr. Belsham had soon the satisfaction of knowing that his conduct was highly approved by those whose judgment he would greatly respect, and from whose applause he would derive the highest gratification. The following letter, among others, has a claim to distinction, on account of the liberal spirit which it breathes, and the great respectability of the writer, the Rev. Hugh Worthington, of Leicester, for more than fifty years minister of the congregation of Protestant Dissenters at that place, and father of the celebrated and popular preacher at Salters' Hall :

“ How has the news distressed me, that the seminary at Daventry is to lose a learned Tutor, a person of so much intellectual perception, liberal sentiments, diligence, piety, temper, and prudence ! Shocking ! A loss unexpected, never likely to be fully repaired ! Never to me ; but this is nothing, if compared to what the seminary, the Dissenting interest, the public, must lose. My heart is grieved within me. I admire my friend's integrity, but

I lament the change of his opinion, which will be a triumph to some people, but, I fear, no benefit to religion or learning; but I dare not assert this. However, the love of truth and uprightness of conduct manifested by him, do honour to his heart, and ought to render him the object of esteem to the good and candid, though they may differ from him in opinion.

“Whenever he can make it convenient, my pulpit and my lowly dwelling will be honoured by his presence, and he will meet with a cordial welcome by his respectful, affectionate brother, and obliged friend,

“H. WORTHINGTON.

“*Leicester, April 8, 1789.*”

The following extracts from Mr. Belsham's diary are so intimately connected with the narrative, and tend to make the reader so well acquainted with the situation, circumstances, and feelings of the subject of these Memoirs, that they seem to be peculiarly entitled to insertion:

“I have now entered upon a new year, and have reason to review the last with great gratitude. I have enjoyed many distinguished mercies;—a great share of health, ease, liberty, affluence, friends, protection in journeys and voyages, means of improvement in knowledge and religion. I have been brought low and God hath helped me;—a dangerous illness at the beginning of the last year, but I was raised from the bed of languishing, and my life was given me for a privilege. It was spared that it might be improved. But oh! what has

been the improvement? I review with shame—violence of passion, unbecoming language, neglect of the duties of the closet, distrust of Divine Providence, and the want of a proper habitual sense of God upon the mind. And oh! can I say that, either as a tutor or a pastor, I have been uniformly diligent and faithful in the discharge of duty?

“I enter upon another year in circumstances which fill my mind with anxiety and distress. I am fixed in my resolution to resign my congregation and the Academy; and the more I think of it, the better I am satisfied with the purpose, and with my reasons for it. I cannot in honour and duty continue where I am. If the congregation or the Trustees, knowing my scruples, desire my continuance, my way is clear. But it cannot be my duty to act inconsistently with honour and integrity.

“O God of mercy, prepare me for the interesting events of this year. If I am to enjoy health, ease, and tranquillity; if I meet with friends; if pleasing prospects open to me, beyond what I could reasonably expect, may I see thy hand in all, and receive thy favours with a grateful and dutiful heart. If I am to be cast upon the wide world, unnoticed and unpitied; if I am driven to solitude, to obscurity, and to poverty; if I am exposed to contempt and reproach; if I am visited with sickness, pain, and even death itself, O let not my confidence in thy promises and government be shaken. May I ever walk uprightly, knowing that by this means only I can walk surely. Continue the light both of my body and my mind. Open for me a situation,

tolerable at least, if not honourable and affluent. Thou knowest that I cannot support or go through what others may. Thou art acquainted with all the weakness of my mind, and the frailty of my nature. O press me not beyond the strength which thou affordest."

"Tuesday, January 25th.—A memorable day. To-day I sent my letter of resignation to Mr. Paice. A very important step in life. I know not, nor can I guess, the consequence. I have thought upon it, and prayed over it repeatedly; and I think I have done right. I tremble when I look forward to futurity, but I desire to confide in Providence,

"And cheerful through the desert tread,
For God will guard, where God shall lead."

"Sunday evening, February 1st.—The most important week of my life has now elapsed. Having become a Unitarian, I hope after the most diligent, impartial investigation, I have thought it my duty to resign the Academy. I hope I have acted on right principles, and that I have not, in a cowardly manner, deserted my post before I was properly relieved. I have many very anxious thoughts; but I desire to refer all to God."

"On Thursday, February 12th, I received a letter from Mr. Paice, announcing the acceptance of my resignation. This has been a week of great anxiety and distress of mind, especially since I received the official answer of Mr. Coward's Trustees. But a letter I received this day from Mr. Paice greatly calmed and composed my mind; and I now feel easy and satisfied."

It is to be regretted that this letter is not to be

found amongst Mr. Belsham's papers. It may be presumed that it contained honourable testimony to the fidelity with which he discharged the important duties of his office, and to the upright principle upon which he had acted, in the delicate and critical situation in which he was placed.

The following prayer which Mr. Belsham composed upon the occasion, and which he transcribed into his diary, shews how deeply his mind was affected, and how earnestly desirous he was to act with integrity and wisdom. If it be imagined that it betrays a degree of anxiety, and a greater depression of spirits, than his situation imposed, it should be considered, how much resolution it required to abandon a situation which he had so long filled with so much credit to himself and advantage to the Trust, and that at a moment when the reputation of the Academy was at the highest, when the number of the students was the greatest, when the duties of his office were becoming more interesting, and would have been more easy and pleasant to him, and when his resignation, and the avowal of sentiments which were regarded as heretical, would expose him to greater odium and misrepresentation than can be imagined after a lapse of forty years, when those sentiments have been more generally adopted, and the motives and principles of their advocates more justly estimated. This prayer, as well as the preceding, with the reflections which are incorporated into it, refutes the charges which he brings against himself of want of devotion, of a sense of the presence of God, of its controuling and

practical influence, and of his own deficiency and demerit, and indicates that his sense of delinquency arose in a great measure from the high notions which he entertained of the perfection of character essential in one who professed to be a disciple and follower of HIM “who knew no sin,” and a minister of his holy gospel.

A PRAYER.

(February 8th, 1789.)

“O merciful God, Father of lights, who givest liberally and upbraidest not, to whom should I have recourse in this season of perplexity, anxiety, and despondency, but unto thee ?

“Thou knowest the earnestness and zeal with which I was bent upon the investigation of truth ; thou knowest the pains I have taken to discover it. I will not dare to say, thou knowest how impartial I have been in my researches, for, alas ! I am but too sensible that the mind may be powerfully influenced by prejudices unknown to itself, but obvious to others, even when it imagines itself most free and unbiassed in its inquiries. But I can with humble confidence say, thou knowest with what sincerity I have endeavoured to divest my mind of every prejudice by which I suspected that I might be influenced ; and thou knowest with what earnestness and importunity I have implored the influences of thy spirit to preserve me from error, and to lead me into the knowledge of all useful and necessary truth.

“ I bless God, if my laborious researches have been attended with any degree of success ; and if, in consequence of the pains I have taken, my views of evangelical doctrine have been refined and improved ; if, while I have discovered more of the simplicity, I have also learnt more of the true value of the gospel, now I am more sensible of the importance of its discoveries, and now I prize it more highly than I have hitherto done.

“ O God, having, I humbly hope, been enlightened in the knowledge of thy truth, having discovered what I apprehend to be the falsehood of those monstrous, absurd, and idolatrous doctrines by which the beauty of Christianity has been defaced, and the glory of the Divine attributes has been obscured, I have, on many accounts, thought it to be my duty to make an explicit avowal of my principles, to take the consequence of my deviation from vulgar creeds, and to endeavour to contribute my part to the purification of the gospel from those dregs of error, by which the pure and sublime spirit of Christianity has been miserably adulterated and debased.

“ I have, in this view, made a declaration to the supporters of the institution under my care, of the revolution in my principles, and have thought myself bound in duty and honour to resign an office which I am no longer qualified to hold, and to which I should never have been chosen, had my principles formerly been what they now are. This resignation they have accepted, and it is my firm intention shortly to resign the charge of my congregation.

“ O my God, may I not appeal to thee for the purity of the principles upon which I have acted? Have I not repeatedly laid the case before thee, and earnestly implored direction from thee? Is it indolence or cowardice that induces me basely to desert a post of labour and difficulty, or can I be moved by any distant view of honour, or emolument, or ease? O Lord, thou knowest the heart of thy servant; I cannot charge myself with having acted upon these, or on any other secular and unworthy motives. I am sensible of the deceitfulness of the human heart; but I can say, I know of nothing but a sense of duty and honour that would have induced me to take the step which I have lately taken.

“ And now, O Lord, I am going forth into the wide world, not knowing what may befall me, and not having where to lay my head. My heart is full of anxiety, and my mind is sometimes almost overwhelmed with apprehension. ‘ But why art thou cast down, O my soul; why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him.’ O my God, my soul is cast down within me, therefore will I remember thee.

“ The signal appearances of Divine Providence in my behalf upon former occasions, and the faithful promises of God to bear the burdens of those who cast their care upon him, and to direct the steps of such as acknowledge him in all their ways, ought to encourage me. And, O Lord, they do encourage me. I am ashamed of my want of faith in thy experienced care, in all thy gracious promises. O remember thy word unto thy servant,

on which thou hast caused me to hope. Support my sinking faith. O cheer my fainting spirit, and soothe my troubled mind. Whisper to my bewildered, distracted, desponding soul: ‘Fear not, for I am with thee’—‘this is the way, walk thou in it.’

“The reproaches I shall meet with for the desertion of former principles, parties, and friends, I hope I am prepared to bear; and I thank God I have no particular reason to dread distressing indigence. In this view I am particularly thankful for the late appearance of Providence in the disposition of my secular affairs, (the conversion of real into personal property,) which renders the step I am now taking, so much easier than it would otherwise have been. I hope I would not murmur if I am laid aside from public service, as a vessel in which my Master has no pleasure. I cannot but desire still to be useful in the church, and am ready fondly to think that I am now better qualified for it than ever I have hitherto been; but if my heavenly Father has otherwise determined, I would bow in submissive silence.—If God choose to employ me, he will open the door of usefulness, and will allot me some proper station in his church; but if not, thy will, O God, be done. Here am I; do with thy servant as seemeth good in thy sight. ‘Send, I pray thee, by whom thou wilt send.’ ‘God does not need either man’s work or his own gift.’

who best

Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best:—

thousands, at his bidding, speed.

They also serve, who only stand and wait.

MILTON.

I am terrified at the thought of being idle; of having nothing to employ myself in; no object

in view. But, perhaps, even here God may be better to me than my fears—and I will not distrust his parental goodness, but with humble submission wait his pleasure.

“ O Lord, I ask for thy supporting presence.— If deserted by my friends, if a wanderer in the world, if destitute of any settled place of abode, if I meet with contempt and reproach, let me remember that others, far more worthy than I, have met with all this and worse ; yea, that the Son of God himself had not where to lay his head ; and let me be willing to bear all my Father’s pleasure.

“ O merciful Father, direct me, I beseech thee, to some suitable situation and employment ; and, wherever I go, may I take with me a peaceful conscience and an approving God. Thy presence is light in darkness, is health in sickness, is joy in sorrow, is life in death. O lead me forth by the right way till thou hast brought me to the city of habitation ; and enable me to rest with immovable confidence upon thy providence and promises.”

“ Sunday evening, Feb. 15th.—My mind has become more calm and composed than it was last week. I feel more of a disposition to acquiesce in being laid aside, and ambitious thoughts have not much disturbed my mind. O that I were more devoted to God, and more inwardly awed by his presence and holiness !”

“ Sunday evening, March 1st.—I composed the charge for Mr. Butcher’s ordination, with intention to read it as a devotional lecture, but I afterwards altered my mind. I have seldom found more pleasure in the exercises of religion than to-day. I was

almost impelled to take the subject I chose* against my will, certainly against my intention, which was to preach upon the duties of the sons of God. But this subject suited my situation and the state of my mind. I was affected both in prayer and preaching, and at the Lord's table; and I hope that the impressions which I felt will never be effaced.

“This last has been a week of business. Nothing very memorable occurred. I received a letter from Mr. Smith, expressing his approbation of the motives which influenced my conduct.”

“Sunday evening, March 29th.—My intention to resign Daventry is now quite public. The reflection, at times, is very oppressive; but I see no reason to repent. All at present is darkness and uncertainty, but I will trust in God. My friends encourage me, but I do not see what can be done.”

“Sunday evening, April 5th.—I wonder at the conduct of Divine Providence. I received a letter from Dr. Price yesterday, inviting me to the new Academy. I received another from Mr. Stone this morning, explanatory of the former. It came at a time that my mind had been perplexed and distressed. It came when I was lifting up my heart to God for advice. If I might believe that the providence of God could concern itself about the conduct of one so unworthy as I, this might seem as an answer to prayer. I was heard while yet speaking. My mind is more at ease, because there seems

* John xii. 27: “Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I to this hour: Father, glorify thy name.”

a prospect of a settlement. My heart has been greatly affected with it, at various times to-day. O will not the goodness of God, at last, lead me to love him, and serve him, and give myself wholly to him ?”

Perhaps there were no persons more involved in the important step on which Mr. Belsham had determined, or more affected by it, than the pupils who then enjoyed the benefit of his instruction. A large portion* of them had completed their course of studies, and were leaving their alma mater, but they were among the number of those who were most sensible of the advantages which they had enjoyed, and of which their junior brethren would be deprived ; and with a strong feeling of respect for their tutor, and of sympathy in each other’s regret, they united in presenting the following address to Mr. Belsham :

“ *Daventry, May 12, 1789.*

“ REV. AND DEAR SIR,

“ We feel ourselves impelled, equally by duty and by inclination, to testify the sincerity of our concern for your removal from an institution which has so long flourished under your able and affectionate direction.

“ We view with self-congratulation the superior advantages we have enjoyed during your wise and

* The senior class consisted of twelve divinity students ; two of these had entered the new College at Hackney, but the remaining majority, at the termination of the session, were candidates for situations as ministers of congregations ; and though, with one exception, avowed Unitarians, were most of them invited to eligible and important situations.

successful superintendence. We recollect with the most grateful emotions the liberality of sentiment, the temperate and sober discipline, and the unre-mitted application to the discharge of duty, which have invariably distinguished and adorned your character, and we esteem it a peculiar and inestimable privilege, that our education has been completed or advanced in a seminary where your most vigorous efforts have uniformly been directed to promote the purest virtue, the most fervent piety, and the most extensive knowledge.

“ Inadequate as must be every return that we can make to your merit, we esteem ourselves happy in being able to make one fully equal to your wishes ; and we may be allowed to express our hope and confidence, that neither time nor temptation will be able to destroy those principles of vital religion, and that spirit of liberal inquiry and fearless avowal, which your precepts have so strongly recommended, and your example so powerfully enforced. While we reflect with gratitude upon the past, and with painful solicitude look forward to the future, we are sensible we ought to consider it as some alleviation of our distress, that though your abilities and labours will be withdrawn from the institution, they will not be withdrawn from the world ; and, however small, we cannot but feel some consolation in the prospect, that your sphere of usefulness will still be equally extensive.

“ In whatever situation you, Sir, or ourselves, may be placed by Providence, you will do us the justice to believe, that the knowledge of your happiness will always prove a most valuable addition

to our own, and you will accept our most affectionate and ardent wishes, that after having devoted the whole vigour of life to the important interests of science and religion, the evening of your age may be peaceful and serene, illumined by the glorious hope of immortality, and the pleasing reflection, that your labours have not been in vain. We are, dear Sir, your affectionate pupils," &c.

The Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM in reply.

"MY DEAR FRIENDS,

"I am inexpressibly obliged to you for the late testimony of your affection and respect. You do me justice in giving me credit for an earnest desire to promote, to the utmost of my power, your improvement in wisdom and goodness, and to assist you in your inquiries after truth. Happy had it been for us had my abilities been equal to my inclination to serve you in your most important interests. God is my record, that I have no greater joy than this, to see you diligent and impartial in your inquiries after truth, modest and candid, yet honest and courageous in your profession of it, acting on every occasion in conscientious conformity to your principles, and willing to forsake all, that you may approve yourselves genuine disciples of your Master, and may be acknowledged and approved by him at last. Words can ill express the emotions of my heart at the prospect of parting with so amiable, so orderly, and so affectionate a set of pupils.

"Before we finally separate, if my feelings will permit, I will take an opportunity of addressing to

you a few valedictory hints ; and, wherever Divine Providence may hereafter dispose of my lot, while memory and feeling shall continue, I shall ever remain, with the best wishes and most fervent prayers for your happiness, both here and hereafter, your very affectionate and faithful friend,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, May 30th, 1789.*”

Mr. Belsham closed the session, together with his arduous, but happy and useful administration, at Daventry, with an Address to the Students, in which he stated the reasons which induced him to resign the office of Divinity Tutor in that institution. It will serve to shew the motives by which Mr. Belsham was actuated, and be a specimen of the manner in which he was accustomed to advise and admonish his pupils, to make some extracts from this discourse, which is now before the writer.

“ To address you upon these occasions, Gentlemen, has always been a painful task, but never so painful as *now*. Amidst the tumult of my thoughts and feelings, I find it exceedingly difficult to know what to say to you. In the present state of my mind, I can only drop a few short and broken hints, which will need your candour, and will have nothing to recommend them to your attention, but that it is the last advice of one who, in the course of his connexion with you, has endeavoured to approve himself a faithful and zealous friend to your most valuable interests.

“ In the first place, no doubt, our thanks are due to the Giver of all good, who has brought us in so

much mercy to the close of another session, and who has crowned our mutual connexion with harmony and peace. ‘O let us give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever.’

“ I next return my thanks to you, gentlemen, for the uniform civility, respect, and affection which I have met with from you. It has been my endeavour, in every instance, to behave to you as a parent anxious for your improvement, honour, and felicity ; and however I may, at times, have failed in my duty in this respect, I am bound to acknowledge, that the behaviour of the most dutiful children to their parent could not have been more affectionate, and respectful than yours has uniformly been with regard to me. And I cannot but very particularly express my admiration and gratitude for the tenderness of your conduct, since you have been made acquainted with the very difficult and interesting circumstances in which I have found myself, in consequence of the important step which honour and conscience have impelled me to take, the resignation of the direction of the Academy. I have often observed, with tears of pleasure, the delicate caution which you have used, that you might not, by any appearance of rudeness or misbehaviour, add to that distress with which it was easy to conceive that my mind, at times, must have been overwhelmed. The good sense, good principle, respectful sentiment, and generous sympathy of your affectionate letter, have made an indelible impression upon my heart.

“ I have often wished that I could retire in peace

into the shades of silence and obscurity without involving others in the consequences of that measure which I find it necessary to adopt. Nothing in the whole course of this business has grieved me more than to see the perplexity and confusion into which many of my friends have been unavoidably thrown in consequence of my relinquishing the charge of the Academy. To many of you, gentlemen, in particular, the step which I have taken is attended with serious consequences. It puts you at present into a very uncomfortable state of suspense; and however my successor may surpass me in ability and learning, in ardent and faithful zeal for your improvement in science and virtue I will yield to none: however my successor may surpass me in ability and learning, yet the change of a mode of study, even for the better, is usually a temporary disadvantage to the student, as it always requires some time even for young minds to divest themselves of their accustomed habits of thinking and study, and to acquire new ones. You, therefore, gentlemen, have a right to know upon what principles I acted, in bringing you into a state, the inconveniency of which you now sensibly feel. I shall therefore take the liberty of stating to you in a few words the reasons of the step which I have taken; which I shall rather do, as it will not only give me an opportunity of vindicating my own conduct, which I flatter myself you are not disposed to censure, but also to justify Mr. Coward's Trustees, who have fallen under some degree of obloquy among those who do not perfectly understand the

nature of the Trust, and the views with which this Academy is instituted, and must be conducted.

“ I trust, my friends, that you, who know me, and you especially who have attended my theological lectures, will do me the justice to believe that it is not without a very painful and laborious, and I trust impartial, investigation of the subject, that I have changed my views concerning some important points of Christian doctrine, and from having been a very zealous advocate for the pre-existence, that I am now become a confirmed believer in the proper humanity, of Jesus Christ. This change of system did not suddenly take place. I even entered upon my inquiries with a firm persuasion that I should be able with ease to baffle the arguments of Unitarianism, by the declarations of Scripture. I flattered myself that I might be of some considerable use in checking the progress of a doctrine which I considered erroneous in its principle, and mischievous in its consequences. I thank God, I also entered upon the inquiry with a determined resolution to follow evidence whithersoever it might lead, and to shun no investigation, whatever might be the consequence—and I can truly say, that I have myself followed the advice which you will bear me witness, my young friends, I have repeatedly given to you, and when wandering in the perplexities of religious controversy I have lifted up my anxious heart to the God of truth, the Father of lights, imploring his heavenly wisdom to preserve me from the paths of error, to enlighten me in the knowledge of truth, and to inspire me with fortitude

to avow whatever appeared to me, after diligent inquiry, to be the genuine doctrine of divine revelation; yet still it was by very slow degrees, that what I now apprehend to be the light of truth, made its way into my mind, nor was it without great reluctance and many struggles, that I gave up the principles of that strictest sect of our religion in which I had been originally educated.

“But it has been asked, Why need you have resigned, when there was no complaint against you? Why should you voluntarily throw yourself out of a station of honour and emolument, of extensive usefulness, and in which you enjoyed the best means, and the most favourable opportunities of disseminating the principles which you deem to be of great importance?

“In reply to this objection I must premise, that I am not one of those spiritual Quixotes who go in quest of adventures to acquire a name; and if there is an individual in the kingdom that is more unwilling than any other to be the subject of general conversation and animadversion, I believe that individual is myself. Nor do I profess a stoical insensibility either to honour or to interest; and if I know myself, there is nothing in which I take greater delight than in promoting free inquiry, and in assisting inquisitive minds in their researches after truth. Theological truth is of all subjects the favourite subject of my inquiry, being of all truth the most universally interesting and important; and therefore I certainly never would have resigned a situation so respectable, so advantageous, and so

useful as this, without what appeared to me the most cogent motives.

“The true cause of my resignation is, that by becoming a Unitarian I incapacitated myself from answering the end for which the institution is established, and for which I was chosen to preside in it.

“There are two ends for which this institution is founded—the promotion of truth and learning, and the supplying of Dissenting congregations with acceptable ministers. Truth obliges me to observe, that these two ends are not always compatible with each other, and when they interfere, truth and learning must fall a sacrifice. This is no fault either of the Trustees, or of the Tutors. It is the spirit of the Testator’s will, and the Trustees consider themselves as bound to act up to it.

“It has further been asked, Why was my resignation accepted, when the will of Mr. Coward is expressed with so much latitude,* that it was in the power of the Trustees to have continued me in office?

“But the same reason which induced me to resign, induced them to accept my resignation.

* There is, indeed, considerable latitude in the terms which describe the purposes to which the property of the Testator is to be applied, which, as Mr. Belsham has observed, (see *Memoirs of the Rev. T. Lindsey*, p. 286,) “leave the Trustees at liberty to apply it to the support of whatever they might judge to be the cause of Christ among Protestant Dissenters.” But it was well known that Mr. Coward was a zealous Calvinist, and it was proper that a due regard should be paid to the religious opinions of the Testator, and to the object which he had in view, when he devised his property to the support of a Dissenting Academy.

The end of the institution would be defeated, and the spirit of the will would be totally contradicted, by placing a Unitarian Divinity Tutor at the head of Mr. Coward's Academy. I have reason to believe that it was mentioned in the Trust, that I should be solicited to resume my office, but the motion was overruled under the idea that it would be treating me with greater friendship and respect to accept, without hesitation, a resignation so explicit, and founded upon such just principles; and it would be injustice to Mr. Coward's Trustees not to embrace this opportunity of declaring, that, through the whole of this interesting and momentous business, they have conducted themselves with delicacy, honour, and friendship.

“I cannot better express their own views on the subject than in the following extract from a private letter of a member of the Trust: ‘Had I been at your side,’ saith my friend, ‘when you wrote your resignation, in the situation of a friend and not of a Trustee, I would have said to you, My good friend, you are right; you act nobly: God and the whole world approve your conduct and will applaud it, and there will be no day of your life when you will not be proud of having acted thus. On the other hand, had I, in the same situation, received your resignation from one of Mr. Coward's Trustees, and been asked how I thought they ought to act, as honest men and faithful trustees, I would have replied in similar language—You should by all means accept the resignation. Accept it with every possible expression of esteem and affection to your most able and worthy Tutor. His ease and

honour forbid you tampering with him in such a case. The duties of your Trust, in compliance with the general intention of the person who appointed the Trust, and to the general congregations of Dissenters, recommend your ready acceptance of a resignation made in so explicit a form, and upon such good ground. You are not to act as individuals executing your own will, and disposing of your own property, but as Trustees for the purposes of Mr. Coward's will; as Trustees, therefore, bound to execute that will to the best of your power. Rigid interpretations are the acts of weak minds, but a regard to general intention marks the mind that wishes to act right.'

"Thus, my brethren, have I fairly set forth before you my reasons and motives for the important step which I have taken, and which has unhappily brought you into your present disagreeable dilemma; and I trust I stand acquitted before you and the public, as well as in the sight of conscience, and of God. I go forth, not certainly knowing what shall befall me, or where I shall fix my future habitation. But I confide in a wise and faithful Providence, and would humbly follow its direction and submit to its disposal. In no situation which I may hereafter occupy, do I expect to be more useful or more happy than the virtue, diligence, and affection of my present pupils have rendered me in that which I now sustain.

"And now, my brethren, may I presume to use the language of an apostle? — 'Be ye followers of me,' but so far, and so far only, as I appear to you to be a follower of Christ. Do not believe because I

have believed ; do not act merely because I have acted ; but judge whether I have had sufficient grounds for the conduct I have pursued ; and if so, let me entreat you, by the affection and respect which I have always met with from you, to think and act accordingly. If you think differently, by all means act differently. Judge for yourselves, and let your conduct ever be consistent with your principles. If we differ from each other, let us exercise mutual candour, pitying the ignorance and infirmity of human nature, and waiting with humility for the instruction of the great teacher, Death, which will correct all our errors, and introduce us into regions of perpetual and unclouded day.

“To you, who are quitting the house and entering upon the ministry, permit me to address a few words before we part.—Do not indulge anxious thoughts with regard to your future situation. Learn to confide in Divine Providence, and cast your care on Him who careth for you.

“When you are fixed with a congregation, be attentive to the duties of your office. ‘Take heed to the ministry which you have received of the Lord, to fulfil it.’ Above all, study the Scriptures with the greatest attention. They are the grand storehouse of divine knowledge, and are able to make the man of God, the faithful Christian minister, perfect, and furnish him thoroughly to every good work.

“Do not judge of the sense of Scripture by the mere sound of the words ; endeavour to understand their true meaning ; and in order to this, I beg leave

to recommend two general rules, out of many others that might have been mentioned.—In the first place, remember that the sacred writers have an end in view. Endeavour to discover the scope of their argument ; this will often lead you into the meaning of particular passages, which, without this caution, you would not understand. This, as some of you well know, is remarkably the case with the writings of Paul.—The next rule is, Learn not to judge of Jewish idioms and forms of speech by the literal meaning of the same words, literally translated into the English language. It is chiefly owing to the want of attention to this simple, obvious rule, that the Scriptures have been so frequently misunderstood, and the sacred writers have been thought to have taught doctrines, the very idea of which never entered into their minds.

“Be humble and modest, but fearless and intrepid in your avowal of what, after diligent inquiry, you believe to be evangelical truth, whatever personal inconveniences may result from it. ‘This is our rejoicing,’ saith the apostle ; ‘even the testimony of our conscience.’ But let me caution you not to make the pulpit the theatre of religious disputation.

“Be instant in season and out of season. Be yourselves examples of piety and of prudence. Cut off occasions from them who seek occasion to speak evil of you and of your doctrine. Be especially solicitous to instruct the young, and to form them betimes to the principles of wisdom and goodness ; and let there be no room for the reproach,

which many are so ready to cast upon us, that when we lay aside the prejudices we lay aside the piety and the zeal of our forefathers.

“If you are faithful and zealous in the performance of your duty, your pious labours will not go unrewarded. You serve a kind and generous Master, who will not be unmindful of the work of faith, and the labour of love.

“I shall conclude with suggesting a few hints to those of you, gentlemen, who mean to return to the Academy again.

“Permit me to recommend it to you to think and speak respectfully of Mr. Coward’s Trustees. They are persons of the most respectable characters, and have your best interests at heart. With regard to your Tutors, I have only to recommend it to you to behave to them as you have hitherto behaved to my colleagues and myself; with the same attention, the same tenderness, the same candour, the same willingness to receive instruction, the same submission to needful reproof.

“Be kindly affectionate one to another in brotherly love, in honour preferring one another.

“I would advise you to be cautious in reading many books that have not an immediate reference to the subject of your lectures, and to your business here. My chief objection against book societies has always been, that they furnish you with a variety of amusing books, which divert your attention too much from far more important, but less entertaining subjects.

“Apply with great diligence to your proper studies. Dig for truth as for hidden treasure. It

will amply reward all your pains. If there is any fault in the course of study here, it is, that there is too great a variety of objects proposed to your attention. I would recommend it to the person who wishes to attain eminence, and to make a distinguished figure in life, to pay a general attention to every branch of learning, but to select and pursue with particular assiduity two or three branches of science only. The human mind is too limited, and life is too short, to embrace a great variety of objects ; but it is easy to attain excellence where the objects of attention are properly confined.

“ Seek for truth with impartiality. Follow evidence wherever it leads. Avow your principles with modesty and courage. Always be willing to receive information, and maintain a due sense of human fallibility ; and forget not the apostolic advice, ‘ If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.’

“ To conclude, let me press it upon you as my last and most earnest advice, that you remember your Creator in the days of your youth, and serve the God of your fathers with a perfect heart and with a willing mind. Wisdom, religious wisdom, is the principal thing ; therefore get wisdom. Religion will be the ornament of your youth, and the comfort of your age, your solace through life, and your only sure support in death. It is the pearl of great price, which it is well worth while to part with all that you have to purchase.

“ Finally, brethren, farewell.—Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and

the God of love and peace shall be with you. Amen.”

The writer of these Memoirs cannot deny himself the pleasure of endeavouring, though with a feeble hand, to sketch some of the qualifications which rendered Mr. Belsham an able and efficient superintendent of the institution over which he presided.

Though of a warm and hasty temper, he certainly had greater command over himself than might be expected from his own account, and from the severe reflections which he often makes upon his conduct. It was only when greatly irritated by some apparent personal disrespect, that he momentarily lost his self-command. When he was obliged to exert the authority of office, he was careful it should appear that he acted from deliberation, and from a regard to the welfare of the parties concerned. In most instances, it was acknowledged by those who allowed themselves to think coolly of the case and circumstances, that Mr. Belsham's proceedings were right and justifiable. The consistency and dignity of his official conduct secured the full weight and influence of his authority ; and the good effect of the discipline which he exercised was manifested in the complete establishment of the order and regularity of the family.

Mr. Belsham appeared with peculiar advantage in the lecture-room. The stores of knowledge which he possessed, and the thorough investigation which he made of every subject to which he di-

rected his attention, eminently qualified him to impart to others the best instruction and information. He had also the advantage of knowing, by long experience in tuition, the best method of communicating knowledge, and had acquired a peculiar felicity in doing it. This is an excellence not always possessed by persons of the greatest talents and information. The ease with which they made those attainments for which they are distinguished, and their great intimacy with the most intricate parts of knowledge, make them forgetful of the process which ordinary minds must go through, before they can understand the subject to which their attention is directed. Mr. Belsham was distinguished by great clearness of perception, and by a happy method of communicating his sentiments in plain, but correct and appropriate, language. He well knew what was most important in the subject under discussion, and was peculiarly careful to point it out, which he did in a manner that secured the attention of his pupils. He had great patience and perseverance in ascertaining how far his communications were attended to, and in repeatedly presenting the most important observations to the consideration of the class, in a distinct and varied manner, so that they could not fail of being clearly and fully understood. He affected no flights of eloquence, nor ever had recourse to any arts of oratory, either to call forth admiration, or to captivate attention ; but he had great clearness in unfolding his meaning, and great facility in illustrating his sentiments, so that he was at all times intelligible and interesting to the youngest of his

pupils; and so careful was he that nothing important should be omitted, that nothing intricate should be misunderstood, that nothing difficult should be misapprehended, that he was sometimes diffuse and prolix, careless of fatiguing those of quick apprehension so that he might ensure the comprehension of the subject in all. His pupils always had ready access to him in private, if they wished for further explanation or information; and he was disposed at all times to listen patiently to the detail of their difficulties, and candidly to make allowance for the imperfection of their conceptions. He never permitted himself to throw out any reflection upon their understanding, or, in any sarcastic or ludicrous manner, to ridicule the mistakes or errors into which they had fallen, either through want of knowledge or ability, if it were evident that their ignorance or incapacity did not arise from their own neglect and indolence; a fault from which persons of wit and talent are not always exempt, but which has a most unhappy effect upon the minds of those who are the subjects of it. Where idleness was clearly manifested, Mr. Belsham could be severe, but there was a dignity and consideration in his remarks and censures, which made it impossible they should not be regarded, and at the same time such an evident wish of benefiting, as evinced his affectionate solicitude for the improvement and welfare of his pupils, at the very moment that he expressed the most decided disapprobation of their conduct.

These remarks have been drawn from the writer by the recollection of the efficient manner in which

Mr. Belsham discharged the duties of his office, of the propriety and judgment with which he exercised controul, and enforced attention to the rules and business of the institution; of the method by which he excited the exertion of his pupils in their studies and pursuits, and introduced that order and decorum which are so essential to the formation of the youthful character at that hazardous and uncertain period of human life. The young men entrusted to his care, found in him an intelligent and obliging friend, whom they respected and loved the better they knew him, and the longer they experienced his vigilant superintendence of their conduct, and his wise and faithful attention to their improvement and welfare. The consciousness that they were watched in all their mental exercises with anxiety and affection, wrought most beneficially upon their conduct and application, and the longer his pupils were under his guidance and instruction, the more desirous they were of standing high in his esteem and friendship. However strict or arbitrary his conduct might appear in particular instances, perhaps there have been few, who have filled the arduous situation which he occupied, who, in after life, were more esteemed or loved by those who had been subject to his authority, and who had enjoyed the benefit of his instruction and advice.

It would be a high gratification to the writer of this Memoir to describe the character of Mr. Belsham, as a Tutor and a Minister, in a just and accurate manner. He is confident, that the more correctly and faithfully it is delineated, the more will the reader be impressed with a sense of the pro-

priety, the dignity, and the usefulness with which he filled each of these important offices. It has already been observed with what unremitting diligence he devoted himself to the duties of each, how careful he was that his time should be employed in the fullest and best manner, that nothing might be neglected which was essential to the progress of his pupils in the attainment of knowledge, in their inquiries after truth, or to assist their efforts to qualify themselves for the discharge of the various and arduous duties of the Christian ministry, or for usefulness in those situations of public or private life which they might be called to fill. As the pastor of the congregation committed to his charge, he was equally solicitous to promote the edification and religious improvement of the several members of it. He was deeply interested in those important truths which he inculcated upon others. A fixed and habitual sense of their momentous interest gave an earnestness and pathos to his manner of delivering them, which greatly affected the hearer ; and though he possessed none of those external advantages which attract the attention and fix the thoughts of the audience, perhaps there were few preachers who were heard with a deeper interest, or who left a more lasting impression upon the mind. It was evident that his great and sole aim was to instruct and edify ; to fit immortal and accountable creatures for the suitable discharge of duty here, and for the enjoyment of everlasting life and happiness hereafter. Nor were his exertions for this end confined to the pulpit. Though he reproaches himself, as the reader is aware, for great neglect in

visiting his flock, it must be remembered how little time the occupations of the tutor left for the duties of the minister ; and with whatever deficiencies he might appear to be chargeable, his remissness was not owing to a want of inclination, but of opportunity. Yet, whenever circumstances of interest or difficulty arose, Mr. Belsham was ever ready to improve the one and to alleviate the other. In seasons of affliction and distress, he was prompt to assist, advise, and comfort, and in the house of mourning he was a constant and sympathising visitor. No opportunities of improving the dispensations of Divine Providence were lost, and few could be unaffected by the judicious and affectionate manner in which he endeavoured to impress the minds of the sufferers on these occasions. Of the high sense which the members of his congregation entertained of his learning, ability, and usefulness, and of their strong and cordial attachment to him as a Minister, the reader has had decisive evidence in the efforts which his friends at Worcester made, both to procure and to retain his services ; and the society at Daventry afforded an equal proof of their esteem, and confidence, and affection, even when the great and important change which had taken place in his religious sentiments made such a wide and insurmountable difference between them, by the deference which they paid to his advice, and the solicitude which they manifested to avail themselves of his influence in obtaining a suitable successor.

It has already appeared, that a proposal was made to Mr. Belsham, by Dr. Price, to accept a situation

in the New College, Hackney; in consequence of which Mr. Belsham had an interview with some of the gentlemen of the committee for the management of that institution; but, for the reason assigned in the following letter, he felt himself compelled to decline the office which he had been solicited to accept.

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to Dr. PRICE.

“DEAR SIR,

“I am very sensible of the honour conferred upon me by the committee, in the proposal made, that I should take the office of Resident Tutor in the New College; and I am greatly obliged to them for the disposition they have manifested to render the situation and mode of living as agreeable as the circumstances of the New College would admit. A station of greater honour and more extensive usefulness I never expect to occupy. I am nevertheless under the necessity of declining the handsome offer of the committee, as I cannot think myself justified, either in honour or gratitude, in abandoning a sister, to whose prudent management of my family concerns, as well as tenderness in other instances, I feel myself under obligations which I cannot repay.

“I was always a sincere well-wisher to the interests of the New College. The respect I have lately met with from its governors and tutors will be a powerful additional motive to rejoice in its prosperity; and though the unavoidable concurrence of circumstances disables me from rendering it any personal service, it will always afford me

peculiar pleasure to hear of its growing reputation and success.

“ Will you permit me, Sir, to trouble you with my respectful compliments to the gentlemen of the committee, those in particular whom I had the honour to meet, and also to the tutors, whose obliging readiness to adjust the lectures in such a manner as to leave a department which I might undertake without impropriety, has left upon my mind a deep and permanent impression of respect and gratitude.

“ To the friendly interest which you, Sir, have been pleased to take in the whole of this important affair, and to the very candid and liberal concern which you have repeatedly expressed for my settlement at the New College, I am under very peculiar obligation, and shall ever remain, with the most respectful regard, dear Sir, your obedient and obliged servant,

“ T. BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, May 12th, 1789.*”

This reply to the proposal of the committee was not definitive. There were many interested in the welfare and success of the College, who well knew the value of Mr. Belsham's services, and who were anxious to make those arrangements by which they would be secured. This was ultimately accomplished, and Mr. Belsham signified his acceptance of the office assigned him in the following letter, addressed to Mr. Stone:

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I beg the favour of you to return my respectful

thanks to the committee for the very handsome resolution which they have passed in my favour, and which was communicated to me by you and Dr. Price: the grand obstruction being now removed, by the obliging concessions of the Committee and the Tutors, I no longer decline the honour to which I have been invited, of becoming a resident Tutor in the New College; * and though I am very far from flattering myself, that my feeble services will be of any essential advantage, I shall certainly consider it as an indispensable duty to exert my utmost endeavours to promote the good order, the reputation, and the success, of that respectable institution. I am, dear Sir, with great respect, your obedient servant,

“ T. BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, June 28th, 1789.*”

Writing to his friend, the Rev. Timothy Kenrick, June 20th, Mr. Belsham says, “ I do not know whether my acceptance of this invitation will meet with your approbation ; for my own part, I am not very sanguine in my expectations from it ; and if I had not been very much pressed by Mr. Lindsey,

* Mr. Belsham has given a brief account of the origin of this institution, and of the cause of its decline and failure, in his *Memoirs of the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey*, Chap. x. p. 280. It is greatly to be lamented, that a design so generously encouraged, and supported by such munificent contributions, should have completely failed in the execution, or rather in the conducting of a scheme which promised so favourably to the interests of liberal Dissenters, to the promotion of free inquiry, to the diffusion of knowledge, to the encouragement of learning, and to the support of religion and virtue. May it furnish a useful lesson, should the happy time arrive, when a similar effort shall be made in so good a cause !

Dr. Priestley, and some other friends, who think that my settlement here may be subservient to the interests of truth and free inquiry, I should have declined accepting the proposals.

“ I shall endeavour to put up with what inconveniences I find, and I hope I shall not be unwilling to make some sacrifices for the sake of more extensive usefulness.

“ My separation from my old pupils was very painful indeed; upon the whole, I have felt far more than I expected I should have done; and though I am far from repenting of the step I have taken, yet had I foreseen all its consequences, I do not know whether I should have had fortitude enough to have done what I am persuaded was my indispensable duty.”

When Mr. Belsham had taken leave of his affectionate pupils at Daventry, with those expressions of regard and attachment, and with those hints of admonition and advice, which have been presented to the reader, he had yet a painful task to fulfil, that of addressing, for the last time, in the capacity of their minister, a truly liberal and candid congregation; who, though they entertained very different views from those which had been adopted by their pastor, regretted that they were to be deprived of his services, and would willingly have continued under his ministry, if he could have, consistently, retained his situation in the Academy. It was no trifling proof of the ability and success with which he had laboured, and of the zeal and effect with which he had endeavoured to diffuse the true spirit of Christianity, that his people were disposed to

exercise such forbearance and charity ;* and it must have greatly added to the emotion of the preacher, when he bade them farewell, to know that the change which his sentiments had undergone, and the avowal of it, would not of itself have been the necessary cause of dissolving that relation which had so long subsisted between them and their respected and beloved pastor.

In this discourse, after expressing the pleasure and satisfaction he had experienced in his connexion with the society, and his grateful sense of their candour and attention, Mr. Belsham alludes to the circumstances in which he was placed, and describes the process by which that change of his religious opinions had been produced, which compelled him to relinquish a situation in which he had enjoyed so much real pleasure, and which, it may be added, he filled with so much honour to himself and usefulness to others. The following is the language in which he addressed his hearers :

“ It was far from being my desire or expectation that a connexion so pleasing should have been so speedily and abruptly dissolved ; but in the situation in which Providence thought fit to place me, it was my duty to study the Scriptures with peculiar attention, and I can honestly say, that whatever may be thought of the result of my inquiries, or how much soever it may be supposed that I have been influenced by unknown prejudices, no person ever

* In a letter addressed to one of Mr. Coward's Trustees a little before this time, speaking of the liberality of his congregation, Mr. Belsham says, “ They now wish me to stay with them, knowing me to be a Unitarian.”

took greater delight in this sacred science, or ever studied the Scriptures with a more earnest desire to learn the genuine truths of religion, with a more anxious solicitude to divest himself of prejudice, or with more frequent and fervent supplication for divine assistance and instruction. The consequence of this laborious but pleasing inquiry has been the discovery of a system of revealed truth, which, in my apprehension, gives credibility and inestimable value to the gospel of Christ, and wonderfully illustrates the harmony of the Divine dispensations.

“ In this light, my friends, does that which I call the proper Unitarian doctrine, and which I believe to be the true doctrine of the New Testament, appear to me ; and I think that a person cannot cordially receive this doctrine, and the other truths connected with it and resulting from it, without feeling the greatest veneration for those sacred oracles which reveal the words of eternal life, and which lie at the foundation of our immortal hopes ; and I am firmly of opinion, that these truths are so intelligible in themselves, so perfectly agreeable to enlightened reason, and so clearly consonant to the general tenor of the New Testament, that I have no doubt they would naturally present themselves to every one who could read the Scriptures with an impartial and unbiassed mind.

“ But in this judgment I cannot expect that you should agree with me. I know how frigid, how unnatural, how insipid, what I think the beautiful and divine simplicity of the gospel, appears to those whose imaginations are occupied with those stupendous theories which the pride of human wisdom

and philosophy, ashamed of the doctrine of the cross of Christ, early grafted upon the stock of the gospel. I know what allowance is to be made for long-established habits of thinking, for fixed principles, early imbibed, dictated by venerable parents, instructors, and ministers, represented as of the highest importance, as constituting the very essence of Christianity, and held sacred almost from the cradle. I know what I myself felt in the progress of inquiry, notwithstanding the peculiar advantages I enjoyed, the leisure and the opportunities for investigation which I possessed, how unwilling I was to resign those principles which I had long held dear and sacred, and with what reluctance I yielded to evidence that was little less than demonstration. I could not, therefore, rationally hope to make proselytes of you, who have so little leisure or opportunity to investigate perplexing controversies; nor did I consider myself as having any right, by adopting a strain of preaching different from that to which you have always been accustomed, to shock and insult your feelings, and to make you unhappy. At the same time, I could not justify it to my own mind to suppress what I really apprehend to be important truth. I am enthusiastic enough to think, that the best and the most acceptable return that any of us can make to Divine Providence for being placed in circumstances peculiarly advantageous for the discovery of truth, is, by making a frank and candid avowal of those truths which we believe to be important, by submitting with cheerfulness to the inconvenience to which such conduct may expose us, by using every honest

and honourable means to diffuse the light of truth, and to communicate to others the knowledge with which we ourselves are favoured. Our Saviour teaches us, that when ‘a candle is lighted, it is not to be put under a bushel, but in a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house.’ I think ‘it better to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ;’ and I rather preferred to join myself to a sect every where spoken against, and to profess myself of those sentiments which I know to be generally despised and detested, and the profession and propagation of which will expose me to personal reproach and inconvenience, than to consult my ease and temporal interest, by remaining silent upon a subject that I deem important, or by using ambiguous expressions, to which I could myself have attached very just ideas, but which would have led others to think that I entertained sentiments the very reverse of what I held. I know that the wise men of the world will ridicule my conduct as weak, imprudent, and fanatical: ‘but this is my rejoicing, even the testimony of my conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I have had my conversation in the world.’

“In these circumstances, and upon these principles, having thought it my duty to dissolve the connexion which has so long and so happily subsisted between us, I would take leave, before we part, to suggest a few hints of advice from the comprehensive valedictory address of Paul to the church at Corinth, 2 Cor. xiii. 11: ‘Finally,

brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace ; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.’”

This advice Mr. Belsham applies with his usual judgment and ability, and through the whole discourse manifests the strong impression which the kindness and liberality of his affectionate people had made upon his mind. It was with considerable emotion that he delivered this address, and Mr. Belsham ever retained a pleasing recollection of his relation to this respectable society.

The following letter was addressed to Mr. Coward's Trustees, through one of the number, on the conclusion of Mr. Belsham's connexion with them in an official capacity :

TO JOSEPH PAICE, Esq.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I cannot take leave of Mr. Coward's Trustees without returning them my cordial thanks for the friendship I have uniformly experienced from them, both individually and collectively, during the continuance of my connexion with them, the grateful sense of which no length of time, nor change of circumstances, will obliterate from my mind.

“ While I was at the head of the Academy, I can honestly say that no person ever more ardently desired, or more earnestly endeavoured, to promote the interests of truth and learning, in connexion with genuine, rational, and fervent piety. How far I was qualified for this purpose, or may have succeeded in it, does not become me to say. That my successor, with equal zeal may unite superior

ability, and be honoured with far greater success, and that an institution with which I am connected by a thousand tender ties, and the interests of which will ever be dear to me, may, under the auspices of its present excellent patrons, long continue to possess the honour of supplying our Dissenting churches with a succession of able, faithful, and useful ministers, is the earnest wish of my heart, and the object of my most fervent prayer.

“ When I last wrote to you, Sir, the prospect before me was that of obscurity and silence. Very contrary to my expectation, and, I may add, to my inclination likewise, Divine Providence has called me out to a situation more public and more arduous than any I have yet experienced. My heart shrinks at the prospect of the difficulties I have in view—but the object is great. I am not conscious of having been influenced by unworthy motives, and I humbly confide in the support of that Being whose direction I have devoutly implored. Mr. Coward’s Trustees have views too liberal and enlarged to consider me as engaged in a scheme in any degree inimical to their institution. I regard myself as again united with them in promoting the great cause we all have at heart, the cause of truth and religion, and I trust their candour and their friendship to sympathise in my difficulties, and to recommend my future exertions to the blessing of the Almighty, who alone can administer effectual consolation, and command success.—My respectful compliments attend your reverend colleagues. Accept, Sir, my best thanks for all the favours I have received from you, both in your official and your

private capacity, and believe me to be, with the truest respect, dear Sir, your obedient servant,

“ T. BELSHAM.

“ *Daventry, July 19th, 1789.*”

It may be useful to inquire into the effect of the great change which had taken place in Mr. Belsham's religious views and sentiments, and of the conduct which proceeded from it. Examples of secession from the doctrines of the Established Church, and a renunciation of those privileges and advantages which are connected with the profession of them, had not been uncommon ; and the recent instance of Mr. Lindsey's resignation of the living of Catterick had made a great impression, not because it arose from the broad and general principle of the right of private judgment, which had always been maintained by Dissenters of every denomination, but because it was founded upon the conviction of that one great and leading principle of religion, the Unity of God, in opposition to the formularies of the established faith, and those creeds which every clergyman of the Established Church was required to read and profess as the true faith ; which, if a man receive not, “ he shall without doubt perish everlastingly.” But this impression, whatever it might be upon the clergy and members of the Establishment, little affected the Dissenters, further than that the faith of this distinguished confessor differed from theirs, and in many instances excited as much opposition to his opinions, however true and scriptural, and called forth, with some honourable exceptions, as much calumny and misrepresentation from them,

as from those of the church which he had deserted. Mr. Belsham was the first amongst the Dissenters who had renounced a situation of considerable importance, of great honour and usefulness, and of some emolument, rather than hold it in opposition to the dictates of conscience, or conceal or disguise sentiments which, if known, would drive him from his situation, and expose him to censure and obloquy. In estimating the sacrifice which he made, and the resolution which it required, the singularity of his situation ought to be considered, and the consequence to himself. He had not been preceded by any one who, by a declaration of his sentiments, had disqualified himself for the office which he sustained, and deprived himself of its advantages. Dr. Priestley, indeed, had always been the unreserved and uncompromising professor of what he believed to be the true and simple doctrines of Christianity, and had never been influenced by a regard to personal consequences; and though by this upright and manly conduct he was early excluded from situations of distinction and importance among the Dissenters, he was never required to renounce those which he afterwards filled, because his opinions were deemed heretical and dangerous. But this suffering for conscience' sake Mr. Belsham was called to endure. He might be said to stand at the head of the class of Dissenters with which he was connected. He presided over the chief, at that time, except the rising institution at Hackney, the only seminary of education to which the Dissenting churches looked for the supply of learned and useful ministers. He sat in the chair which had been

filled by Jennings, and Doddridge, and Ashworth, and Robins, who were deservedly held in high estimation for their learning and abilities, for their faith and piety, for their character and acquirements ; he was supported and encouraged by the respectable Trustees of Mr. Coward's fund, and at their urgent request had undertaken the arduous and hazardous task of presiding over the united institutions of Hoxton and Daventry ; the Academy was flourishing under his superintendence, and its reputation was established by his successful exertions to inspire his pupils with a desire of knowledge, with a love of truth, with zeal in the cause of religion and virtue, with the genuine spirit of piety and devotion, and with practical regard to duty, as those who were to be ministers in the church of Christ. In the midst of this reputation and success, conscience loudly demanded, and he listened to her voice—conscience imperiously demanded that he should submit to lose his name and distinction, that he should avow himself of “a sect every where spoken against,” that he should expose himself to censure, and reproach, and blame, and to the neglect and desertion of those whose friendship he had long enjoyed and greatly valued, and that he should submit to be regarded as a deserter from the faith of his ancestors, with little reason to expect that he would find any situation for exertion and usefulness similar to that which he had enjoyed, and which he had filled with so much advantage and success. It is not easy for persons who have not been placed in similar situations—and how few could be so placed !—to judge of the resolution which was required to

obey the call of duty, or of the perturbation and distress of mind attendant upon the effort. Few can judge of the reluctance with which long-established opinions are given up, when the result must be the loss of that fame, of those connexions, of those friends, of that support, and of that society, to which any one has been accustomed; and few there are who can imagine how obnoxious were those sentiments which Mr. Belsham avowed, or how much they were opposed to the prevailing opinions of that class of professed Christians to which he belonged. The rapid and wide spread of these sentiments has made the profession of them comparatively safe and easy, and has freed their advocates from much of that reproach with which they were formerly loaded; but in proportion as this was great and inevitable, was the firmness of mind necessary to encounter it. This Mr. Belsham displayed. Before it was known what had been the change which his sentiments had undergone, before it was suspected that he had made any approach to that pure and simple form of Christianity, which he afterwards so ably supported and adorned, he determined to resign his office. He was sensible that he had so far rejected the doctrines which he once maintained, that if the sentiments which he then held were known to those by whom he had been chosen and appointed, he would neither have been at the head of the institution, nor the minister of the congregation, and he at once resolved to avow his opinions. In this his purpose, there was no faltering, no hesitation of mind, no attempt to tamper with his own conscience, no inclination to

concealment and disguise, no effort to retain for a longer time that reputation and distinction which he had acquired, or the emolument he enjoyed, and which he had reason to believe would continue and increase. He explicitly declared his opinions, and determined to abide by the consequences.

It is true, that he made known his situation to some of his old and tried friends,* in whose opinion and judgment he placed great confidence; but this was only to be assured, that he was not forming a rash, a precipitate, or a needless determination. It was only to ascertain whether their judgment corresponded with his own, and whether the path which he meant to pursue appeared to them, as it did to him, the path of duty. He had scarcely received from these friends the expression of their approbation, before his resolution was officially communicated to Mr. Coward's Trustees,—before he explained to them the grounds upon which it became *their duty* to accept his resignation; and, shortly after, he communicated to the congregation the reason why he could no longer expect them to retain his services as their minister. In all this there was the openness, the integrity, the firmness of a confessor. The consciousness of his own sincerity and uprightness must have supported him in the arduous effort, and the exercise of it threw a lustre around his character, and will entail unfading honour upon his memory.

It may, therefore, easily be imagined, that the

* Vide letters to the Rev. Samuel Palmer, of Hackney, inserted in the *Monthly Repository*, for February, 1830, p. 79.

impression at the time was great and extensive. The attention of religious professors was excited by this singular conduct, by this noble display of integrity and honour. His brethren in the ministry were roused to the consideration of the state of their own minds, of the articles of their own faith, and of the consistency and integrity of their own conduct. Many were induced to examine the evidence of those doctrines which they supposed were taught and inculcated in the Holy Scriptures. Many were led to see the insufficiency of those arguments by which they were supported, and to adopt a more simple and a purer system of faith; and others, who had secretly embraced it, were induced openly and honestly to avow their real sentiments and opinions. The timid were encouraged; the doubtful and the wavering were established and confirmed, they were gradually conducted to more settled convictions, and impelled to an open and manly profession; and the faithful and diligent inquirer after truth was animated in the pursuit, and prepared to meet the consequences of embracing and fairly avowing it. A great and extensive change immediately manifested itself in the state and opinions of the liberal part of the Dissenters. It is certain that they were more disposed to receive the doctrine of the Divine Unity in all its bearings, extending to the rejection of many of those opinions which were reputed orthodox, and more ready to support its advocates, than was generally imagined. The labours of Dr. Priestley had not been in vain. Numbers had divested themselves of the prejudices they had entertained against his writings, and had studied them

with diligence and impartiality ; and instances were not uncommon in which his sentiments were admitted to be rational and defensible, and were openly professed and advocated. It is also to be considered, that what are regarded by Unitarians as the genuine doctrines of Christ and his apostles were beginning to be adopted by the rising generation of ministers in those institutions where freedom of inquiry and fearless investigation were permitted and encouraged. The writer well remembers, as early as the year 1783, when he first entered as a student at Carmarthen,* the senior class, and indeed almost all the students who had paid any attention to the subject, were avowedly Unitarian, in the strictest sense of the term ; and when, in the succeeding year, he removed to Hoxton, he found the same sentiments generally prevailing in that institution. The class which completed their course at the conclusion of the session, Midsummer, 1785, were all declared Unitarians, excepting one ; and the other classes, with few exceptions, were generally disposed to receive, and ultimately embraced and avowed, the same sentiments ; and at the time of his leaving Daventry, where the writer finished his academical course, in the year 1789, these were the opinions of the majority of his fellow-students, who were then entering upon the Christian ministry, yet were they invited by some of the leading Dis-

* Or rather at Rhyd-gors, in the neighbourhood, to which place the Academy had been removed, under the superintendence of the Rev. Robert Gentleman. His assistant, the Rev. Benjamin Davis, who was afterwards minister at Evesham, in Worcestershire, was a decided and professed Unitarian.

senting congregations to the pastorate ; a decided proof how much these churches were prepared to receive the advocates of Unitarian Christianity. It will hereafter appear how much more extensively and effectively Mr. Belsham became the defender and supporter of those doctrines which he believed to have been taught and inculcated by Christ and his apostles.

On accepting the office of Theological Tutor at the New College, Hackney, Mr. Belsham addressed the students in the manner he had been accustomed to do at Daventry. In the commencement of the discourse, after adverting to the unexpected application which had been made to him to accept the situation which he then occupied, and the arrangements which had been so handsomely and liberally made for his accommodation, he observes,

“ I am not acquainted with the principles of my own conduct if I have been influenced by any motives which I need blush to avow, in accepting a share in the direction of this institution. I consider the establishment of this College as one of the noblest efforts of a wise and well-directed liberality ; the object of the institution appeared of the highest importance ; the gentlemen who were concerned in patronizing and conducting it, were many of them persons of the first rank in the scale of human excellence ; and I frankly acknowledge, that I felt an honest ambition of uniting with characters so respectable, in a cause so honourable and useful, and of contributing my mite to the accomplishment of the grand object they had in view.”

He then suggests to his future pupils those ad-

monitions which were peculiarly adapted to their circumstances, and, with the expression of the most affectionate interest in their welfare, offers them that advice which, if observed, he justly thought would be productive of their improvement and happiness, and redound to their own honour and reputation, and not less to that of the College, and of those who presided in it. He reminds them of the conspicuous and delicate situation in which they were placed, of the disadvantageous reports which many were eager to circulate, and of the importance of silencing the calumnies, and of refuting the misrepresentations, of their enemies, by the order and decorum of their conduct, by a regular attendance upon the lectures of their respective tutors, by their diligent application to their studies, and by a strict observance of the rules of the institution; and concludes with an earnest and appropriate exhortation to attend to the duties of religion, to acquire a spirit of liberal, enlightened, and manly piety, as the foundation of all wisdom and happiness, and to live in the fear of God; for, he observes, “A good understanding, a regard to reputation, and a high sense of honour, will go a great way towards forming a respectable, amiable, and useful character; ‘they aid and strengthen virtue where they meet her, and imitate her actions where she is not.’

“But the fear of God is a universal principle. It extends its influence to every action—it elevates every motive—it refines every affection—it dignifies the whole character—it consecrates every thought of the heart—therefore, fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

The students were much impressed by this address, and took an early opportunity of acknowledging the interest which Mr. Belsham manifested in their intellectual and moral improvement, and the advantage which they anticipated under his tuition.

“ To the Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ REV. SIR,

“ Impressed by sentiments of the greatest respect, we take this early opportunity of expressing the pleasure we feel at the prospect of reaping the benefit of your instructions and superintendence. Permit us, Sir, at the same time, to return you our hearty thanks for the affectionate address you last night delivered. We shall esteem it no less our duty than our interest to pay a strict regard to the important objects you have recommended to our attention, and are convinced that, by so doing, we shall most effectually meet the wishes of our friends, and silence the misrepresentations of our enemies.

“ Signed, in the name of all the students, by

“ CHARLES WELLBELOVED.

“ *September 28, 1789.*”

At the beginning of the following month, again addressing his pupils, Mr. Belsham thus expresses himself respecting this letter :

“ If there ever was a moment of life in which I enjoyed a heartfelt satisfaction, it was, gentlemen, at the time when I was reading the unsolicited, unexpected, and respectful answer to the address, which a sense of propriety, and the regard I felt for

you, induced me to deliver, when I first entered upon my present connexion with you. A connexion ushered in with such mutual esteem and affection, with such firm confidence in the rectitude of each other's views and dispositions, augurs the most permanent and happy consequences. The report of it has done you deserved honour; it has raised your character in the esteem of the wisest and best friends of this institution, whose approbation, I am confident, you will esteem as the highest praise. They look forward to the rising prosperity of the institution with delight, and they think nothing too much to expect from a society of young men, of whom candour and ingenuousness form so distinguished a feature.

“As to myself, gentlemen, my best thanks are due to you for the credit you have given me for the purity of the motives by which I was influenced in entering upon this connexion with you. I thank you for the consistency of your conduct with your professions, and for all the politeness and respect which I have met with in my intercourse with you. I trust that you have found no reason to complain of any inconsistency on my part between my profession and my conduct. I am strangely ignorant of my own heart, if I had any other object in view, in fixing my residence among you, than to concur and co-operate with gentlemen of the first character in this or any other age and country, for literary and moral worth, in promoting your improvement in learning and virtue. I have no interest but yours. I have no wish but that you may be wise, and amiable, and learned, and virtuous, and happy. While I

keep this end in view, I ask for your support, I claim your friendship, I confide in your affection. When you see me deviate from this line of conduct, when you see that I prefer my own ease, or interest, or ambition, to your improvement, or to the honour and interest of the institution, let me then lose that place which I flatter myself I hold in your affection and esteem.”

The following extracts from a letter to the Rev. Timothy Kenrick, (Jan. 21, 1790,) contain some account of the manner in which Mr. Belsham was employed, and of the state of the College ; but they are chiefly valuable as they present an animated description of his mind and feelings in the contemplation of a scene that was opening to his view, and some just remarks on the character of professed Christians, of the preceding and existing period.

“I am drawing up three sets of lectures, upon Logic, Metaphysics, and the Evidences of Christianity.* To these will succeed, before the vacation, the Evidences of Natural Religion, and Morals. We are now engaged in the great and glorious doctrine of Necessity. My class consists of upwards of thirty students. Many of them enter thoroughly into the subject, and will, I doubt not, be confirmed philosophical Necessarians.

“Our friend Porter† seems to be going on very

* These have been published, and will hereafter be noticed.

† The Rev. Thomas Porter was one of the students who finished his academical education at Daventry at the time of Mr. Belsham's resignation, and soon after settled as minister of the Unitarian chapel at Plymouth. His design of building a chapel at Dock was soon accomplished, and the place was opened with every prospect of being well

prosperously at Plymouth. I received a letter from him yesterday, in which he mentions a scheme of building a Unitarian chapel at Dock, [now called Devonport,] and of coming to London to collect for that purpose. I much fear he would not meet with the success which his zeal and his merit deserve. A Socinian is still a sort of monster in the world. Very few venture to avow their principles, and those who do, if they are young, are censured as arrogant and rash. But I hope the time is advancing when honesty will come into fashion. We have tried long enough what trimming, and moderation, as it called, will do; and we see that it only tends to keep the world in ignorance. It is now high time to try the effect of simplicity and integrity. Let us avow the truth—let us be willing to suffer for it—let us manifest the same zeal in the cause of truth which others discover in the cause of error—let us shew by our conduct, that rational Christianity is more favourable to genuine piety than orthodoxy and nonsense, and the human mind must be strangely framed indeed, if it will not prefer truth to error, when exhibited with equal advantage; and I will own myself egregiously mistaken, if this honest, upright, courageous, and rationally zealous conduct be not, in the end, most favourable

supported; but in a short time it was found that the influence of CHURCH and STATE was too powerful for the growth of the infant society, professedly Unitarian. Many who were in the employ of the government were deterred from attending, and the interest gradually diminished, till it was found necessary to close the doors, and dispose of the chapel. After an interval of many years, the cause has prevailed. A new chapel has been built, and the progress of Christian truth appears to be advancing.

to the propagation and establishment of truth. If we act in this manner, we must lay our account to meet with much censure, not only from the zealots of error and superstition, but from the prudent, the moderate, the worldly-wise men of our own persuasion, whose lukewarmness will be reprov'd by our zeal. But 'none of these things must move us,' nor must 'we account life dear unto us, so that we may finish our course with joy;' and under losses and censures we must cheer ourselves with the testimony of a good conscience, '*that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom,*' (mark these words, for they deserve to be written in letters of gold, and ought to be engraven on every minister's heart,) 'but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.'

"I seem to myself to see the commencement of a new æra, in which rational Christianity united with zeal and fervent piety shall prevail in the world. The last generation of rational Christians have been too indifferent, too fearful of avowing their principles and exposing themselves to censure, and have taken too little pains with their hearers, and especially with their young people, to form them to just and consistent views of religion and morals, to infuse right principles, and mould them to a right conduct. I now see a generation of ministers rising up, and O may their numbers daily increase! who are actuated by a different spirit. They disdain mean equivocations—they unite rational sentiment with fervent zeal, with manly piety, with active, earnest endeavours to promote the cause of truth and goodness; and they are willing to submit

to reproach, to loss, and to hardship, for the sake of what they deem to be genuine Christianity. They will spare no pains to emancipate our divine religion from that mass of absurdity in which it has been for ages overwhelmed, and to exhibit her to the world in her native simplicity and beauty. Some such have lately entered into the church; some who possess this spirit are now to be found in our Dissenting colleges, and I trust the number will increase. Courage, my good friend; the work is at present laborious—those who enter upon it must expect to bear the burden and heat of the day—but we shall not be left alone. The Lord of the harvest will send forth more labourers into his harvest, and those who go forth weeping shall doubtless return rejoicing, ‘bringing their sheaves with them.’ At present we must expect little thanks for our faithful endeavours to instruct and reform the world; but the day will come when Christian fidelity will receive its complete reward, and, whatever our success may have been, it will be remembered to our honour, that we had it in our hearts to have built a house to the name of our God.

“Fungar vice cotis.—I am laid aside from my ministerial work, and to the wise disposals of an over-ruling Providence I submissively bow with a humble and unrepining spirit. The cause of truth and goodness may be carried on without my feeble assistance. It is an honour greater than I have deserved, to have been the instrument of sending some young ministers into the church, who will be much more extensively useful than I could ever

expect to be. Some little honour I esteem it that I have been counted worthy to suffer losses for the sake of truth ; and though I am silenced, perhaps never to officiate as a minister any more, I rejoice in the success of my brethren, and I wish, as far as in me lies, to excite their zeal, and to encourage their faithful exertions. May you, my dear friend, long continue eminently useful in the very important and honourable station which you occupy in the church.

“ My situation here is upon the whole quite as agreeable as I had any reason to expect. At present the College is full, and the new wing is not complete, so that my sister cannot yet come to reside with me, but we hope that by Lady-day the new building will be habitable, and then we shall have plenty of room.

“ The young people behave upon the whole very well—much better than I expected from the accounts which I had heard before I came. They wanted to be put into a proper train of conduct. I have introduced many new regulations, similar to what we had at Daventry, and we are now much more comfortable and regular than when I first came to the College ; and I hope that in process of time we shall be able to introduce all that order into the department of the Tutors, the plan of business, and the discipline of the house, which is so indispensably necessary to the reputation of the College, and the improvement of the young men.”

Mr. Belsham's friends were gratified to find him placed in a situation so suitable to his talents, and

so favourable to his exertions and usefulness. His active mind was duly observant of the changes which were taking place in the sentiments of the thinking part of the community, political and religious, and he ardently anticipated the certain operation of that light and knowledge which were beginning to diffuse themselves at this eventful period ; for it was an established maxim of his creed, that knowledge and truth must be progressive, and be productive of the most beneficial effects ; but he also knew that much time might be necessary for their operation, and that the life of individuals was too short to justify the hope of witnessing their extended influence. In reply to some observations upon this subject, the following beautiful sentiments occur in a letter, dated February 2nd, 1790, from his friend and predecessor, the Rev. Thomas Robins of Daventry, which will convey to the reader a just picture of the mind of that pious and amiable man :

“ I rejoice greatly in your success and comfort, and have little doubt that both will continue and increase. You have a noble sphere for the exertion of your talents in the cause of religion as well as learning, and I trust will do much towards the introduction of the glorious scene you predict. I cannot say, that I am equally sanguine in my hopes (though I am not destitute of hopes), nor equally hurt by the idea of not being a witness of their accomplishment. I can and do enjoy the prospect, so far as my hopes extend, and please myself with the expectation of rejoicing for ever in the events. What great occasion then for regret, if I should be asleep while the scene is changing, and, without

any perceptible loss of time, should find the blessed change perfected when I awoke ?”

It was early in the year 1790, that Mr. Belsham was called upon to advocate the interest and support of the New College. This he did in a Sermon on the Importance of Truth, and the Duty of making an open Profession of it, delivered in the meeting-house in the Old Jewry. This admirable discourse is a fine specimen of the strength and energy of Mr. Belsham’s mind, when employed upon a subject which interested his thoughts and feelings. The sentiments advanced in it are noble and interesting, and the language is often elevated, clear, and elegant. Mr. Kentish says, in a note to his sermon on the death of the respected author, “I enjoyed some of the best opportunities of marking the more than usual care which Mr. Belsham bestowed on the arrangement and composition of this masterly discourse ; and it was my happiness to be one of the delighted hearers of it.” It is indeed justly entitled to the full meed of praise which it has received, and has been deservedly reprinted in some of the numbers of the Christian Reformer for the year 1830. In the following letter are expressed the sentiments of one who was a competent judge both of the matter and composition of this excellent discourse, and also the writer’s approbation of the regulations which had been introduced into the College :

Dr. AIKIN to the Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I cannot let my son return to Hackney without

a line of friendly greeting to you. Particularly I wish to make my acknowledgments for the present of your *Sermon*, a composition which merits the thanks of every friend of truth and liberal principles; and which, if I may judge of its effects upon others by those it had upon myself, cannot fail of warming the hearts and rousing the exertions of all the votaries of the noble cause it pleads. With the highest pleasure do I see those concerned in the new institution distinguishing themselves for every great and valuable endowment of the mind. Its reputation thus established, must, notwithstanding many temporary evils to which all places of education are liable, secure its lasting success. I have received a copy of the new laws, which appear to me as well calculated as *laws* can be for promoting industry and good morals. But, from my own experience, I rely more on the known and tried abilities of the Tutors in establishing an influence over the *minds* of the pupils. It will give me the most heartfelt satisfaction to learn, that my son is one of those who best secure the confidence and approbation of the Professors.

“I am, dear Sir, with the most cordial esteem,
your sincere friend and servant,

“J. AIKIN.

“*Yarmouth, Sept. 13th, 1790.*”

Soon after the opening of the session in the autumn of this year, (October 8th,) Mr. Belsham gives an encouraging report of the state of the College, though mixed with some apprehension of the permanent establishment of the institution. In

a letter before the present writer he thus expresses himself:

“ We are now going on extremely well. I have been labouring ever since I lived here, to bring the business and the discipline of the College into a regular system, and I have now very nearly accomplished my wish. I see that the committee are inclined to support me in every thing that I propose for the good of the institution, and I have the pleasure to find, that the young men acquiesce in the regulations and restraints which are thought necessary without any reluctance or murmuring. In Mr. Wakefield we have acquired a most excellent Classical Tutor ; Dr. Rees takes a principal share in the mathematical and philosophical departments ; and in addition to the lectures in metaphysics and morals, I have now taken those on divinity and the New Testament. Since order has been so well established, my situation here has been much more comfortable than it used to be. Our pecuniary difficulties are considerable, but we are not in quite so desperate a state as some of our enemies are pleased to represent us in the newspapers. Whether the institution will stand against all the opposition that is made to it, I know not. I am sure that while the same order and good conduct continue which now prevail, we deserve success. Whether we shall obtain it or not, I cheerfully leave in better hands. In this world, ‘ the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.’ ”

The Unitarian Society for promoting Christian Knowledge and the Practice of Virtue by the distribution of Books, was formed in the year 1791. Mr.

Belsham has the merit of having first proposed its institution, in which, he was ably supported by Mr. Lindsey,* Dr. Priestley, and other zealous advocates of the pure and simple doctrines of Christianity. The preamble to the rules of the institution was drawn up by Mr. Belsham in terms which, by some, were thought to be too strict and exclusive, asserting not only the Unity of the Divine Nature, but withholding from every other being any participation in the attributes of God, in the work of creation, or in the government of the universe or of the constituent parts of it, and maintaining the simple and proper humanity of Jesus Christ. The specification of this last article of faith was thought necessary to distinguish the members of the Society from other professed Christians, who, though believers in the unity of God, in the proper meaning of the term, imagined that Jesus Christ had an existence previous to his appearing in the world; that he was superior to all created beings; that to him was delegated the work of creation, at least of the earth and of the solar system, of which it is a part; and that he was engaged in the government of all human affairs, and was acquainted with the secrets of all hearts, as he would finally be the judge of the characters and destinies of mankind. These opinions appeared to Mr. Belsham and to others to be gross errors and corruptions of the Christian

* For an account of Mr. Belsham's introduction to the acquaintance of his highly esteemed friend, see the *Memoirs of Lindsey*, Ch. x. pp. 285 and 291, which may be compared with a striking passage in the same work, p. 146.

doctrine, and the foundation of that homage and religious worship which were paid to Christ by many who embraced the Arian and the Indwelling schemes. Such worship they considered as idolatrous ; such they represented it, and such it is admitted to be by those who maintain the pre-existence and divinity of Jesus Christ, if he be not strictly and properly God. But this expression gave great offence to many, and was the cause of some who were friendly to the general object of the Society, declining any connexion with it. Mr. Belsham, in his own account of this institution, (Memoir of Lindsey, ch. x. p. 299,) admits “it might have been prudent to have omitted this expression, as the doctrine which the Society desired to hold forth, might have been defined with equal distinctness and precision without it.” It has since been contended, that the declaration of the simple humanity of Jesus Christ was equally objectionable, as not being more essentially connected with the strict Unity of God, or more subversive of those doctrines which were regarded as corruptions of Christianity, than other opinions which are maintained by Unitarians. But perhaps it is not sufficiently considered how much the express declaration of this opinion contributed to the discussion of it, and of other opinions intimately connected with it, or how necessary it was to follow the doctrine of the Divine Unity in all its consequences, in order to shew the consistency, the beauty, and the simplicity of the Christian religion, and to remove those crude and superstitious notions which were adopted by many concerning the nature

of man, his condition and circumstances as a moral agent and accountable being, and the ground of his acceptance with God, and fitness for the enjoyment of his favour. There lurked in the breasts of many who professed themselves believers in the strict Unity of God, confused notions of the superhuman nature of Jesus Christ, of his agency in the salvation of the human race, of the efficacy of his sufferings in the removal of human guilt, of the necessity of some atonement for sin, and of the Saviour's advocacy to render the best services of man acceptable to God. But these errors could not be cherished by those who were convinced that Jesus was himself one of the human race, that he partook of the common nature of all mankind and had no other, and that, like them, he was subject to human weakness and human infirmity. If this point were established, whatever dignity he possessed in virtue of his office as the Messiah, to whatever glory he was raised as the reward of his obedience and suffering, and with whatever authority he was invested as the final judge of all men, by *nature* he was not distinguished from other men, and could not be that sacrifice, that propitiation for sin, or that mediator between God and man, which many, mistaking the meaning of Scripture language, imagined him to be; and it cannot be doubted, that the extent to which these notions have been abandoned, and other and juster views of the nature and attributes of God have been received, has been greatly owing to the firmness, the openness, and the fearlessness with which this distinguishing doctrine of the Christian faith was professed and maintained at a

time when it was considered the greatest reproach to advocate the proper humanity of Jesus Christ, and when those who maintained that this was the doctrine of the Christian Scriptures, were not allowed the name of Christian, or to be within the pale of salvation. In this view it still seems necessary that this article of Christian faith should be distinctly avowed and be made prominent in the Unitarian creed, and that the members of the Society were justified in contending for the continuance of the original object of the institution, and for retaining the terms and expressions by which it was defined.—How fully and decidedly Mr. Belsham was supported in these views by his esteemed friend, will appear from the following letter :

“ *Essex House, July 11, 1791.*

“ DEAR SIR,

“ As I cannot be at the meeting of our Unitarian Society on Thursday, I judge it proper to acquaint you, that since our conversation with Dr. Disney and Mr. Dodson, the former has written to Dr. Priestley, signifying to him, that *he and Mr. Dodson still wish to have the preamble of our plan altered, upon the principle of greater comprehension, and to accommodate some very valuable Unitarians at Cambridge* ; but Dr. Priestley has written back to him, that he by no means approves the design.

“ I apprehend, that notwithstanding this opposition to any alteration, endeavours may still be used to carry it, and perhaps at the meeting on Thursday. You, who first proposed to me the formation of this Society, are conscious that this principle of

greater comprehension was *the very thing* that we wished not to hold forth, as being likely in the event to hurt the design, and therefore we can by no means think of altering our preamble from any view of this kind.

“ I think I read to you out of the venerable Mr. Tayleur’s letter, his sentiments in reply to my letter upon the subject ; but I transcribe them that you may repeat them if necessary.

“ ‘ You might very well say, that neither I nor Dr. Priestley would consent to the alteration proposed by the gentlemen at Cambridge. For my own part, if the whole Society could possibly be so inconsistent as to approve of the alterations, I should think that, instead of being the most respectable society in Europe, (which I trust they will ere long be,) they would be the most contemptible.’

“ Indeed there is great force in this reflection. Our Preamble is gone forth, and we are now to make such changes in it as would amount to a concession that we had taken the matter up too highly in alleging that there was any idolatry in the Christian church in our own country, and mistaken in saying, *that rational Christians have hitherto been too cautious of publicly acknowledging their principles, and that this disgraceful timidity hath been prejudicial to the progress of truth and virtue.* Is it a time to dissemble such facts as these, out of compliment to any one ?

“ I have not room nor time to transcribe Dr. Priestley’s letter to me on the occasion, but he expresses himself more strongly than Mr. Tayleur, and particularly with respect to any gentlemen

withdrawing their names and subscriptions on account of not complying with the proposed alterations; and he dwells more particularly on our not expunging the term *idolatrous*;—that such a demand is totally inadmissible. Mr. Russell is entirely of his mind.

“ I am always, with the truest respect, most sincerely yours,

“ T. LINDSEY.”

At the beginning of the year Mr. Belsham had to lament the loss of an old and highly respected friend. The following letter shews the interest which he took in the circumstances of those with whom he was intimately connected, and to whom he was affectionately attached :

To Mrs. RICKARDS, Birmingham.

“ MY DEAR MADAM,

“ I now take up my pen to express my tender sympathy with you and the other branches of a family for whom I have long felt a fraternal affection, under an event which, though long expected, and attended with many alleviating circumstances, must necessarily occasion a painful shock to the tender and ingenuous feelings of those who are most deeply interested in it, and who, being most nearly related to the venerable deceased, were best acquainted with her uncommon worth, and had the greatest reverence for her virtues, and attachment to her person.

“ The race is ended—the warfare is accomplished—the victory is secure—the crown of triumph is

prepared. To the departed, the lapse of intervening ages is no more than an evanescent point, and the termination of the conflict is instantly succeeded by the palm of victory. To every practical purpose, ‘to depart hence is to be with Christ, which is far better’ than to be here. To surviving mourners there remains the soothing consideration of slumbers unruffled by care and pain, and the joyful assurance of a happy resurrection at the appointed period. Thanks, everlasting thanks, be to God for that gospel which opens this reviving prospect, which elevates to this glorious hope!

“Dear, venerable friend, farewell! At our last interview I took leave under a firm conviction that we were never to meet again in this world. But favourable accounts which have been since received, excited a flattering, delusive hope of another interview,—an expectation which has terminated in disappointment. Nothing now remains but the pleasing remembrance of a character of unusual dignity and excellence—the grateful recollection of happy hours passed in the delightful and improving society of eminent wisdom, united with the most active benevolence, and the most rational and fervent piety, together with the consolatory hope—and O may this hope not be disappointed!—of being found worthy another day to bear a humble part in that blessed community in which thy distinguished merits will exalt thee to a station of distinguished honour and felicity.

“There, my dear friend, may we all finally meet and be happy, and we are assured that we shall, if we carefully follow the footsteps of that excellent

character which is now withdrawn from our view. As far as we inherit her virtues, we shall participate in her final reward.

“ With affectionate respects to your brothers, their ladies and families, I am, dear madam, your obedient and much obliged servant,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ *Hackney, Jan. 24, 1792.*”

This year also commenced with a mortifying disappointment to Mr. Belsham. The reader must be aware of the high estimation in which he held the office of a Christian minister, and of the pleasure which he took in performing the duties of that office. From the time of his leaving Daventry he had no regular engagement as a preacher, and his services had been sought for only on some particular occasions. A vacancy having occurred at the Gravel-pit Meeting, Hackney, it was expected that Mr. Belsham would be chosen as the coadjutor of Dr. Priestley, a connexion which would have been peculiarly gratifying to him, independently of the satisfaction he would have had in conducting the religious services of the society. But an opposition arose from a quarter whence it was little expected, and when the sense of the congregation was taken, Mr. Belsham lost his election. This circumstance, it will be seen, he has noticed in his diary.

In discharging the duties of his office as resident Tutor of the College, Mr. Belsham exerted himself to maintain order and discipline in the institution, and to secure the diligent application and decorous behaviour of the students. At the opening of the

sessions, he usually addressed them in a friendly and affectionate manner, holding out various inducements, and suggesting powerful motives to steady and manly conduct, and to a wise and virtuous improvement of the advantages they enjoyed; and he had the pleasure of observing the good effect of his admonitions and advice. In an address before the present writer, he says, "I enter upon this session (1792) with greater satisfaction of mind than upon any session since I have been acquainted with the institution, founded upon the knowledge which I have of your character, which leads me to entertain a pleasing and confident expectation, that you return to the College with a fixed purpose cheerfully to submit to the rules of the institution, and to make a proper improvement of the literary and moral advantages which you enjoy in it."

The constitution of the College was in many respects injudiciously framed, and was little calculated to secure the object in view. Much was left to the superintendence of the Committee, which consisted of gentlemen unaccustomed to the duties of their office, and who could not be expected to be very competent judges of the methods by which young men would be restrained and governed. The domestic management was committed to a person of the most respectable character, but too far advanced in life to have much energy or resolution, and who was of too mild and indulgent a disposition to exact a due regard to the common rules of decorum and suitable behaviour at his own table. This part of the system was found to be so disadvantageous and unsatisfactory, that Mr. Belsham

was urged to undertake the internal management and discipline of the College, and his sister superintended the domestic economy, as she had done at Daventry. Mr. Belsham observes in his diary, which, since his removal to Hackney had been discontinued, but now resumed, "Great changes have taken place in the College affairs. Dr. Kippis, Mr. Jones, Mr. Broadhurst, Mr. and Mrs. Kiddell, and Mr. Pope, have all resigned their connexion with the institution. Dr. Priestley reads lectures on History and Philosophy, gratis; Dr. Rees is Mathematical Tutor; Mr. Corrie, the Classical; and myself the Theological Tutor. My sister undertakes the economy of the family. Had the College set out upon this prudent plan, it might have subsisted in spite of its enemies; but it was born under unfortunate auspices; and I fear that nothing can save it from destruction." Mr. Belsham continues his observations:

"Sunday, Jan. 6, 1793.—I am now entering upon a new year. I review the past with gratitude. It has been a year of great agitation, of much perplexity, of severe trial, but I have passed through it better than I could, in reason, have expected. God has been very merciful to me, and though some blessings have been denied, many have been continued.—Health has been uninterrupted even for a single day; the necessaries and comforts of life have been supplied in abundance; death has not made many inroads upon the circle of my friends. The principal are Mrs. Hunt, of Birmingham, and Thomas Elliott, of Daventry. The former I revered *and* loved as a second mother; the latter I respected

as a faithful, affectionate servant. I have been particularly happy in a growing intimacy with Mr. Lindsey, and in the vicinity and friendship of Dr. Priestley. The friendship and confidence of these excellent men I consider as a compensation for all that I have given up in the cause of truth, and for all the unkindness which I have experienced from those who once professed regard.

“My public services have been very few. I do not know that I have preached six times in the course of the year ; and this door of usefulness appears to be almost closed against me.

“The year (1792) opened with very flattering prospects. The situation I should have chosen for myself, had I been permitted to choose, would have been that of colleague with Dr. Priestley. Of this I was given to understand there was a very reasonable and almost certain expectation, at the commencement of this year ; but * * * very unexpectedly opposed, and my election was lost by one vote only. I endeavoured to keep my mind as much disengaged as possible, and bore my disappointment with cheerfulness. But I find these things make more lasting impression than I at first apprehended ; and the recollection of ungenerous treatment sometimes excites sentiments of indignation and resentment. But I desire to hold my peace ; to consider men as acting in subservience to the will of God, and to submit without murmuring or reluctance. I am sure I have no right to complain, and I may, perhaps, hereafter see reason to be thankful.

“I enter upon the present year (1793) with

prospects more dark and gloomy than ever. It is plain the College cannot be supported on the present plan ; and what will become of me when the institution is dissolved, I know not. Before I came to London I had no particular desire to reside here ; but now I should be unwilling to leave it ; especially to leave my two excellent friends, Mr. Lindsey and Dr. Priestley.

“O my God, I know not what to do, but my eyes are up unto thee. I pant after peace and quiet, retirement, a few friends, and moderate competency ; but thou art pleased to deny my fond inclinations. I do not arraign thy proceedings ; thou knowest what is best. Thou knowest all the folly of my heart : thou knowest what further discipline is necessary to eradicate all foolish habits and affections, and to humble and prove me, and to form me to a uniformly virtuous and pious disposition of mind. Thy will be done. But, O God most merciful, desert me not in the season of trial. Lay no more upon my feeble spirit than thou wilt enable me to bear ; and above all, suffer not the wise and useful discipline of thy providence to fail of its intended and salutary purpose.”

“Sunday evening, Feb. 10.—It is determined, and it is a just and necessary resolution, that the College shall cease at the vacation, at least shall be transferred to some other situation : whether I shall continue my connexion with it, or rather, whether it will succeed if I do, is utterly uncertain.”

Though Mr. Belsham speaks thus despondingly of his own situation and of the continued support of the College, he bears ample testimony to the

exemplary conduct of the students : addressing his friend at Exeter, Feb. 21st, he says,

“ You will perhaps like to know something of the state of our College, and I can inform you with great satisfaction, that its internal state is better than I have ever yet known it. I speak the truth when I say, that I never yet knew so much order and good behaviour in any public family since I have been connected with colleges, and such as I confess I never expected to have seen, when I first formed a connexion with this. I think I may honestly say, that we have not one irregular member ; and it gives me great satisfaction to see that my labours to promote order and discipline have been attended with such good effect. This pleasure, however, is not to continue long. The managers of the College unfortunately set out upon a plan in which it was impossible to continue. They thought the liberality of the public was inexhaustible, and went on purchasing and building till they ran themselves aground in a most enormous debt, to pay the interest of which there is no provision. The consequence is, that it is intended to sell the premises at the end of this session, and the institution must be removed to some other place. This is unfortunate, as our reputation now seems to be in some degree rising, and there appears to be a probability of a reasonable number of students to supply the place of those who are likely to leave us at Midsummer. The political and theological prejudices of the times are, to be sure, strongly against us, but had there been prudence at the outset, nothing could have injured us.

“ Whither the Academy will be removed, or whether I shall continue a connexion with it in its regenerated state, I know not. All I wish for is rest—that I may be able to fix in some situation, and to consider it as my home. I have, I think, been sufficiently tossed about on the ocean of life, and I wish now, if possible, to find a quiet port. I rejoice, however, that there is One who sits at the helm, and who can command the tide. I desire cheerfully to submit to his direction, and to be found faithful and diligent in the duty of my proper post and station, whatever my future lot may be.”

At this time, Mr. Belsham sustained a very serious pecuniary loss, not less than one half of the little provision which he had made for his support in that retirement to which he expected to withdraw. It therefore became necessary for him to obtain some other situation, in which he might officiate as a minister, and perhaps engage in the instruction of the young. But few were open to him. The odium which was attached to the sentiments which he professed, and which he would think it his duty to state and recommend, excluded him from many where his abilities would have been suitably exerted; and those who took the lead in others, would think that his talents and reputation precluded any hope of obtaining his services in a small congregation. His friend and former tutor, the Rev. Thomas Halliday, having signified his wish to resign his situation at Norton, in Derbyshire, some steps were taken by Mr. Lindsey to introduce Mr. Belsham to the late Samuel Shore, Esq., and it seemed determined that he should occupy this situation,

whither his sister intended to accompany him. The society was very small, and the interest was chiefly supported by the highly respectable families of Meersbrook, and Norton Hall. In this limited sphere, Mr. Belsham would not have had room for that display of his abilities, nor the opportunities of making those exertions which he had in the situations which he afterwards filled ; but he would have been very far from that obscurity to which he fancied himself doomed, and would have found in the friendship and society of Mr. Shore and the branches of his family, at least some compensation for that from which he would be removed. The reader will observe great inconsistency in the observations which occur in the following extracts from the diary, with the declaration Mr. Belsham had recently made : “ I pant after peace and quiet retirement, a few friends, and moderate competency.” But, alas ! how difficult is self-knowledge ! How little was Mr. Belsham aware that he could not have borne that privacy and seclusion which he seemed to think so essential to his tranquillity and to his moral improvement, if indeed he could have suffered his talents to be unemployed, and his abilities to be so little displayed as to be himself secluded or little known. But the time was not come that his connexion with the College was to be dissolved, and other and more important engagements awaited him.

“ Sunday evening, March 10th.—I will say unto God, Do not condemn me : shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. Why is every scheme frustrated ? Why is every prospect darkened ? Why

is every hope blighted and cut off?—But why do I use the language of repining and complaint? I will be dumb, and open not my mouth, because God hath done it. I will kiss the rod with humble submission. I well know my ill desert, and while I sink under the reiterated stroke, I will acknowledge the justice of God in my own condemnation. What is the cause of this unusual severity in the dispensations of Divine Providence? Let me search and try my ways; but O let me not sink into despondency and despair. What time I am afraid let me trust in thee. And why should I not trust? How often has God appeared for me, and helped me, even beyond my most sanguine expectations! O that my heart was moulded into quiet and complete subjection to thy dispensations, and that I had no will but that of God!”

* Sunday evening, April 14th.—My prospects are still dark and gloomy. Scarcely one ray of hope penetrates through the solid darkness, to cheer my benighted and bewildered mind. I have of late been inclined entirely to give up all connexion with this or any other institution. I wrote to Mrs. Lindsey concerning Norton. My sister approves it. I am not sure that the situation in a village so far from town would be quite agreeable, but I am in circumstances in which an option is not left me. I must learn to put up with many inconveniences, and be thankful if I am supplied with the necessities of life. A settled dejection has seized my mind, which unhinges me for business, unfits me for company, and distresses me in solitude. I endeavour to employ myself as busily as I can, that I

may not give way to it, nor sink under it. I am sometimes prone to indulge repining thoughts. Why am I set as a mark for his arrows? But I submit in silence. ‘Shall the thing formed say, Why hast thou formed me thus?’ Whatever my sufferings are, whether bodily or mental, I will still believe that God is good. O God, enlighten my darkness, cheer and support my mind, and either avert from me the evils that threaten me, or impart strength to bear them with firmness and fortitude.”

“Friday, April 26th.—I have now entered upon my forty-fourth year. Goodness and mercy have attended me hitherto. I have enjoyed a wonderful degree of health, and I have wanted no necessary good. In the last year I have met with great disappointment, and great losses. They were perhaps necessary to bring my thoughtless spirit to reflection and wisdom. I am thankful if I have borne them with any degree of manly fortitude, and if I have been preserved from murmuring at the ways of Providence. All before me is impenetrable darkness. I can hardly guess at the events that await me in the ensuing year. I seem destined to retirement and obscurity in a country village. I thank God that I am not wholly forsaken, and that if I am constrained to leave one situation, another is open to receive me. If I am not indulged in my favourite wishes, I am at least elevated above my desponding fears. O God, I know not what to do; my eyes are up unto thee. It is but a little longer that my season of activity or usefulness can be continued. Prepare me for approaching events. Direct my steps; encourage my heart; speak peace

to my troubled mind, and comfort to my dejected spirits. Thou hast been my guide, my help, my supporter, and my deliverer. Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God, of my salvation. O place my mind under a proper discipline, and let it not be finally deserted and given up by thee. I see where my danger and where my best safety lies; and, O God, I will not repine at any discipline that may be necessary to ensure my final safety and success.”

Mr. Belsham was constantly expecting the dissolution of the College, an inevitable event which did not immediately ensue. By the exertions of the friends of the institution, it continued to struggle with its difficulties for two years longer, and every effort was made by Mr. Belsham to preserve its reputation and to promote its success. But its destiny was fixed, and circumstances contributed to hasten its fall. This was a great source of uneasiness to Mr. Belsham, and pressed upon his mind with a greater weight than might have been expected, considering how little he had anticipated any permanently beneficial exertions in behalf of an institution which had within itself the principles of instability and decay. From the beginning, the scale of expense was far beyond the supply which the liberality of that part of the community to which the New College looked for support, was able or inclined to furnish. The system of internal management and discipline first instituted was injudicious and impracticable, and when a better was adopted, the funds of the College were exhausted, and the event was melancholy and disastrous. An institution

for the education of young men designed for the Christian ministry among the liberal Dissenters, under the superintendence of learned and efficient tutors, near the metropolis, is much wanted, but it is to be feared that the failure of Hackney College has furnished ground of discouragement to any attempt for this purpose, which will not soon or easily be removed.

This was an eventful year to Mr. Belsham. Such was the illiberality of the public mind, and so harsh and arbitrary were the measures of government, that Dr. Priestley found his residence in this country scarcely safe, and he resolved upon emigrating to America. The resignation of his connexion with the Gravel-pit Meeting was a matter of course, and opened a way for Mr. Belsham's exertions most congenial to his wishes, and, from the manner in which he was placed in this situation, highly gratifying to his feelings. On resuming his station as minister of a congregation, he may be said to have commenced a new æra of life. The energies of his mind were called into exercise, and he entered on the duties of his office with the zeal and ardour of one, whose whole heart was occupied in the important work, and whose delight was to be instrumental in diffusing the knowledge of what he deemed important truth, and the sublime though simple doctrines of the Gospel, and to secure its influence upon the minds of his people. Treading in the steps of his respected predecessor, though in a path to which he was no stranger, he was assiduous in his labours for the benefit of the young, and was unceasingly active to promote their attain-

ment of knowledge and their progress in virtue. In addition to the usual services of the sabbath, he delivered several courses of lectures, which were open to the attendance of all, but were chiefly intended for the instruction of the junior members of the society, and in this he was so encouraged as to find it a means of extensive usefulness, and a source of peculiar satisfaction and delight. In noticing the events of the year in his diary, the reader will perceive how much his mind was depressed by witnessing the decline and anticipating the fall of the institution, and will be equally gratified to find that he was relieved from the despondency it created, by the unexpected change which took place in his situation and circumstances.

“Sunday evening, Jan. 5th.—I entered upon the last year with prospects unusually gloomy and discouraging ; but upon the whole, matters have turned out better than could reasonably be expected. I had resolved upon quitting the College, and had secured an asylum at Norton, in Derbyshire ; but the affairs of the institution were put under the direction of a committee, and it was determined that the College should be supported in its present situation and state. Though our numbers are low, yet there seems to be some reason to hope for a revival of the institution.

“I have had little employment this year as a preacher, and now begin to be almost out of the habit of it, and to rest satisfied with the departments of tuition, if it is the will of Providence to limit me to this province.

“My health has been uninterrupted, and mercies

numerous and great. Death has not been permitted to make any considerable inroads upon the circle of my friends. The principal business of the year has been to condense my lectures on the pre-existence of Christ, and to alter and improve the lectures on metaphysics. I have also paid a good deal of attention to the study of the New Testament, and something to that of the world.

“Public affairs are very dark, and for the first time in my life I entertain very serious and gloomy apprehensions upon political subjects. I endeavour to divert my mind, by keeping myself fully employed. Here again is a source of uneasiness, that I do not, or cannot, fulfil the task I set myself. Upon the whole, however, I find this the most successful method of relieving my uneasiness; and I hope I shall be able to bear the burden of life with fortitude and resignation for the few remaining years or months of my wearisome pilgrimage. I hope I do not complain of my Maker. I do and will believe that God is good. His mercy endureth for ever. I see and feel much of his goodness; and hereafter I hope I shall see and experience more of it, when, cleansed from all moral pollution and infirmity, I can look up to him with cheerful confidence, and meditate upon him without terror and without anxiety.”

“Lord’s-day evening, March 30th.—How limited is human foresight! I thought myself altogether cut off from public service, and on a sudden I find myself called to one of the most conspicuous situations among the Protestant Dissenters. God knows how little I sought it, or expected, or desired

it; but the circumstances under which it was offered to me were such as made it impossible to decline. Dr. Priestley resigned his charge the second Lord's-day in this month. Mr. Rickards nominated, and Mr. Vaughan seconded me, as successor to the Doctor. On the 23d, at a large meeting of the subscribers, I was unanimously elected, and to day I sent my answer of acceptance to a letter delivered to me on Friday. My answer was read to the subscribers after the Doctor had preached his farewell discourse to a congregation the most crowded that I ever recollect to have seen upon any occasion.

“‘Who am I, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?’ ‘With my staff,’ saith Jacob, ‘I crossed this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.’ I resigned Daventry Academy and Congregation in August 1789, and my only expectation and wish was to live in a small house in Birmingham, in the neighbourhood of Dr. Priestley.—I was drawn involuntarily to take a department in the New College, and I have remained here, year after year, expecting each year to be the last. Last summer, for the first time, the College was put upon a footing that promised permanency, and I was intrusted with the board of the students, and the management of the institution, as formerly at Daventry. The convulsions which took place in the congregation upon the death of Dr. Price, and what I then esteemed the base desertion of my friends, threw me out of all prospect and expectation of a connexion with this society, in *any shape*. Dr. Priestley's ministry has produced

a great change in circumstances, and my election has been as honourable as my former rejection was mortifying. I hardly thought it possible, for I would have stood no opposition and no ballot, nor would I have preached as a candidate. All this was dispensed with. I was nominated one Lord's-day, and the next, at a numerous meeting of the subscribers, summoned for the express purpose, I was chosen unanimously. Thus has Divine Providence cleared my way, and this encourages me to undertake the office, hoping that what God has called me out to, he will qualify me for."

"Lord's-day evening, April 6th.—I preached my first sermon to-day—Rom. i. 16: 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.' Though the first sabbath in the month, the congregation was numerous and respectable. They seemed very attentive, and I have been pressed to print the discourse.* I also administered the Lord's Supper. I found myself composed, cheerful, and comfortable, owing chiefly to the pains I had taken to prepare my notes, and to reading my prayers. It takes from my mind an insupportable burden. In the afternoon I went to Mr. Lindsey's to meet Dr. Priestley. I spent half an hour with him, and then took my leave of him and Mrs. Priestley. The Doctor was in pretty good spirits: Mrs. Priestley very low."

The reader who can look back to this period, and recollect the state of the public mind, will know

* It has been given to the public. Mr. Kentish observes, "It is a sermon of no common excellence, and well deserves republication in a permanent form."

that in religion, as well as in politics, there was a prevalent disposition to doubt the justness of established opinions, and to question the evidence by which they were supported. This incredulity extended even to Christianity itself, and a bold attack upon revelation, by a very popular writer, had done much to shake the faith of some, who ought to have been better acquainted with the ground upon which it was built, and who afterwards were ready to acknowledge that they were too easily “carried away by every wind of doctrine, and by the sleight of men.” Among those who erred from “the faith once delivered to the saints,” were a few who had been avowed and zealous Unitarians, with whom Mr. Belsham had been in habits of intimacy and friendship ; and he was greatly affected and distressed to observe this desertion in the ranks of those whom he had been accustomed to regard as the friends of pure and undefiled religion, and the advocates of truth and virtue. The following extracts from letters before the writer of this Memoir will shew how much Mr. Belsham was disposed to derive encouragement and support, in the darkest and most appalling circumstances, from the confident belief of the agency and government of God. If the reader should be surprised that Mr. Belsham himself should fall under the suspicion of scepticism and unbelief, it should be recollected that it was the practice at this time, nor is the disposition yet altogether extinguished, to represent those who did not admit the absurd dogmata of an established creed to be Christian truth, as heretics and infidels, and to deny that they had any claim to the Christian

name. But under this calumny, the consciousness of sincerity and integrity was to him, as it must be to all, a broad and powerful shield against the shafts of bigotry and fanaticism. He who knows the purity and uprightness of his own mind is seldom much disturbed by the misrepresentations of ignorance and prejudice.

“I greatly lament the fall of ———. I was ready to say, as the prophet Samuel in the case of Eliab, ‘Surely this is the man whom God hath chosen’ to promote the work of reformation; but I bow to the reproof which was given to the prophet: ‘The Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord searcheth the heart.’ God will carry on his own cause in his own way, and if the instruments in which we place the greatest confidence are laid aside, others, less splendid perhaps, but in reality better qualified for the service, will rise up in their place.”

In another letter to the same correspondent he writes,

“I much lament that ——— and ——— have deserted their colours; but I hope they have not deserted Christianity. Many of their best friends doubt whether they will find their account even in a temporal view, in quitting the ministry for a secular employment. In these instances I think we see the consequences of mixing too much with the world. Both these gentlemen seem to me of late to have made politics their principal concern, and proportionably to have lost sight of the great value of religious principles. I am persuaded that if we

mean to do much to promote the cause of truth and virtue, we must, like our great Master, be *not* of the world. I am very sorry for ——'s apostacy from Christianity, but I cannot say I am greatly surprised at it. I acknowledge that the state of things among the professors of rational Christianity at this crisis is such, that if I did not firmly believe the Christian religion to be the cause of God, I should have very little hope of its success. But great is the truth, and it will prevail; and I am persuaded, that if the Divine Being sees fit to make no use of those instruments which to our limited understanding appear most eminently qualified for the work, deliverance will arise from some other quarter, and I can cheerfully trust the Governor of the world to conduct his own cause in his own way.

“The reports which you mention as circulated concerning myself amuse, but do not at all hurt my mind. I should have thought that I had exhibited proofs sufficiently obvious and satisfactory of my attachment to truth, and it is not very probable, either that I should profess Christianity if I did not believe it; or that I should so lately have resumed the public exercise of the ministry, if I did not in my judgment approve of it. But ever since I made a public profession of Unitarian principles I have considered myself as fair game for the shafts of ignorance and bigotry, so that, laying my account for all manner of calumnies, I am neither surprised nor concerned when they occur. Ταράσσει ἡμᾶς ἐτὰ πράγματα, ἀλλὰ περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων δόγματα. In the College I read lectures in defence of the Chris-

tian religion, in public I preach in its defence, and take more pains than most of my brethren in explaining the Christian Scriptures; I also lecture the young people of my congregation in defence of the Christian religion, and have been taking a great deal of trouble in answering Mr. Paine's *Age of Reason*. If after this, people will not believe that I am a Christian, nothing that I can say or do will convince them of it."

The efforts which had been made to support the College were found only to prolong the struggles of a dying interest, and it was at length determined to leave it to its fate. In a letter dated Feb. 19, 1796, Mr. Belsham says, "No formal resolution has yet passed concerning the institution, but it is taken for granted that it will be suspended or dissolved at Midsummer. I, for one, am determined to relinquish my connexion with it; and if I do, I shall probably be no further concerned in the business of education. If my plan had been pursued (meaning from the commencement), the institution could never have been reduced to the state in which it is. A constant, vigilant superintendence of the tutors, such as I proposed, would have effectually prevented those irregularities which, in the vicinity of London, could not be checked by any other means. When a number of young men live together in the same house, there will always be some irregular and even immoral. But this is not our only ground of complaint,—there is an unaccountable tendency in the young men, in this part of the world, to infidelity, and the studious and virtuous part of our family have very generally given up Christianity.

This is an evil to which no remedy can be applied. Actions may be restrained, but thoughts must be left free.”

At Midsummer, as was expected, the business of the College was suspended, never to be revived. The buildings and the premises were sold to discharge the debts which had been contracted, and a small surplus remained as a permanent fund, to be applied to the support of a similar institution, should an attempt ever be made to establish an academy upon a more judicious and practicable plan. Mr. Belsham retained his connexion with the respectable society at Hackney, as minister of the Gravel-pit Meeting, and took a house large enough for the accommodation of a few pupils, who enjoyed the benefit of his instruction and superintendence. In this manner he was employed during the eleven years that he continued in this office, faithfully and diligently discharging his duty to his congregation, and to those who were placed under his care, devising and executing various plans for the improvement and edification of his flock, and especially of the young, in which he had great comfort and success.

Mr. Belsham had communicated to his highly-esteemed friend and predecessor at Daventry an account of the fate of the College, of the termination of his official labours in that institution, and of his future plans. The following extract is from a letter in reply :

“ Few, if any of your friends, could so fully sympathise with you under the labours, anxieties, disappointments, and mortifications attendant on your

late important office, both here and at the New College, as my past experience has enabled me to do. Some of yours, indeed, I never experienced, but I always considered the superior strength of your mind as giving you the advantage in point of ease and enjoyment. But if release from so tremendous an office, though attended by such a degradation as I have experienced, and the loss of many refined and exalted delights, has proved, all things considered, a good rather than an evil, how cordially may I congratulate you on your removal from a state so painful and perilous, into one, with your taste and habits, so easy, and at the same time so honourable and so useful! I think I once expressed to you the confidence which I know I felt, that, if the institution which you superintended should fall, you would soon find yourself upon ground more firm and pleasant than ever; and I rejoice that the event thus far justifies the expectation. Long may it continue to exceed it. You have certainly cut out for yourself work enough, but you have, for more than twenty years, been preparing for it, so as to render it now rather a delightful amusement than a painful labour."

It is singular, that the following sentiment, which is found in the conclusion of this letter, should fall from the pen of so amiable and excellent a man, or that he should entertain any doubt of his final acceptance and happiness. Whether the language be that which persons of his religious opinions were accustomed to use, or whether it arose from a real distrust of being included in the number of the elect, it is equally to be lamented that the pleasure

of religious feelings and of religious hope should be checked by such phraseology, or by such fears.

“I envy you your social pleasures, but I hope I am of some use to my few connexions here, and I desire and endeavour to be content, and could be so, were all right within, and in my future and final prospects; but in these most important respects I am more and more unhappy.”

Some years after this time, (in 1800,) Mr. Belsham says, “I received a letter from Mr. Robins a few days ago. He writes in low spirits as usual, regards himself as having passed his life in trifling, and looks forward to his approaching dissolution with dismay, or at least with great anxiety. Surely those principles must be erroneous which leave such a mind as his, at such a time, in a state of fear and distress.”

It is singular that expressions not dissimilar should have fallen from the pen of the Rev. Job Orton, deservedly held in high esteem by his contemporaries of every religious denomination, and by all who are acquainted with his character and writings. They occur in a letter before the present writer, dated Sept. 8, 1779, addressed to Mr. Belsham, at Daventry.

“I have been uncommonly ill for above a fortnight past, occasioned partly by the hot weather, which always hurts me, but chiefly by the growing infirmities of age. I find death working in me, and cannot expect to continue long here. I am exercised with many painful doubts about my own state and the Divine acceptance. Loss of time, and want of more close, serious, and frequent addresses to my

congregation, in private, lie as a heavy burden upon my mind. I hope you will have the charity to think of me in your daily prayers ; and when you do so, consider me, not as better than I am, but as indeed I am, a great and most miserable sinner. May you increase while I decrease, and have more comfortable reflections on your diligence, seriousness, and success in your Lord's work than I have."

Neither of these excellent men can be suspected of any sinister motive in thus depreciating themselves. That they were sincere in the expression of such doubts and fears is unquestionable. Something may be attributed to the low state of their spirits at the time of writing ; and something to a prevalent mode of expression, common to religious professors ; but much of this language must be ascribed to wrong notions and improper views of the character of God, of the condition of man, and of the influence and effects of Christian principles and motives upon their own hearts and lives. Surely correct and enlarged religious sentiments would have removed these morbid feelings, and inspired men of their characters and moral excellence with firmer hopes and brighter prospects.

The following letter was addressed to a friend who had renounced the profession of Christianity :

" DEAR SIR,

" I thank you for your letter, which I have just received, and for the frank exposition of your sentiments which it contains, and of which I shall make the use you desire. Of your disbelief of revelation I had heard from quarters so various and

unconnected, that I naturally concluded you were desirous it should be known and understood that your sentiments on this point were changed.

“ I have known so many intelligent and virtuous men who have of late become unbelievers, that I am far from regarding the relinquishment of the Christian religion as necessarily impeaching either the understanding or the morals, and I am much hurt when I hear any insinuations of this kind thrown out by others. I am sure that abuse is not argument, and if Christianity cannot be supported by reason, it is not worth supporting by railing. While I believe the Christian religion to be true, I must believe that persons who renounce it give up one of the most powerful motives to virtue, and lose the best source of consolation ; but I am persuaded, that in many instances habits of virtue and rational considerations will do much to countervail the loss of religious principles. And I flatter myself, that many, who now look forward to the grave as an eternal rest, will be agreeably disappointed, when they find their benevolent exertions rewarded with renewed existence, and endless, ever-growing felicity.

“ I am not one of those who think, that the evidences of the Christian religion are clear of all difficulty ; but after mature deliberation I find them to be such as in all other cases would warrant a practical regard, and lay a foundation for cheerful hope. Beyond this I neither go nor wish to go. It is the state of mind to which I believe it was the design of Christianity to raise us, and which in this imperfect state appears to me most favourable

to virtue and peace; being equally remote from dogmatism and scepticism, and combining practical principle with rational consolation.

“I have seen with surprise and regret, in many instances, that the unlimited freedom of inquiry, for which I have always been a zealous advocate, has led to scepticism; and, as you observe, hitherto not many have returned to their old principles, *vestigia pauca retrorsum*. I am still, however, firmly convinced, that truth must be favourable to virtue, and that freedom of inquiry must ultimately be favourable to truth; and as I am, on the one hand, persuaded, that the present progress of infidelity will conduce much to the overthrow of all state religions, so, on the other, I flatter myself that many virtuous and inquisitive minds, after having been awhile upon the boisterous waves of scepticism, will in the end take refuge in the safe and serene harbour of revelation.

“In fact, the scepticism of serious and inquisitive persons seems to me to arise principally from a desire of mathematical precision and certainty in the evidences of revelation, without sufficiently adverting to the consideration, that in all great practical questions, and in this amongst the rest, it is our duty to regulate our conduct by probability. Often, while we are seeking after certainty, the time of action is lost. Notwithstanding our difference of opinion in points that I conceive to be of some importance, I shall be very happy to see you when you come to London; and am, in the mean time, dear Sir, very sincerely yours,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.

“*December 23, 1796.*”

The extracts from the diary of this period, which will be interesting to the reader, are the following :

“ Lord’s-day evening, April 27th (1794):— Yesterday I entered upon my forty-fifth year. Goodness and mercy have hitherto attended me. I cannot think of the goodness of God to me without wonder and gratitude ; at the same time I acknowledge myself to be alarmed at the consideration, how much of life is passed, and how far I still fall short of that temper of mind which is an essential qualification for heavenly happiness. I have at present nothing external to produce great disquietude. Providence has most wonderfully and mercifully cleared my way since I entered on the last year of life ; and I feel myself much happier in my external circumstances than I ever expected to be again. Nevertheless, I have sustained some great, irreparable losses. The removal of Dr. and Mrs. Priestley, &c., all reminds me that it is a changing world. But, alas ! nothing is sufficient to rouse me to proper preparation for my great change. O ! that I might now at length exert myself to some valuable purpose ; and that the discipline of Providence may be properly subservient to the improvement of my mind. I cannot have many years to live. ‘ O Lord, teach me so to number my days that I may apply my heart to wisdom.’ It is indeed high time to awake out of sleep.

“ Public affairs are in a most alarming state, and the violence of our administration bodes ill for the peace of the community and the friends of liberty.

“ In this dark prospect I am sometimes ready to inquire, Where is the Regent of the universe ? What good can arise out of these terrible evils, and

why could it not have been produced without them? But I bow in deep submission to the will of Heaven. I feel the attachment to life lessen, and think with satisfaction, that a few more fleeting years will terminate my course. But I am not easy with respect to an hereafter. I see so much amiss in myself, that I cannot but entertain most serious and anxious doubts as to futurity. But I hope that, ultimately, all will be well, and that, after the necessary discipline is finished, I shall be qualified for final and everlasting felicity.”

“ Lord’s-day evening, Jan. 4th (1795): I began the past year with very discouraging prospects, and God has been better to me than my fears. I considered myself as thrown aside, ‘like a vessel in which there is no pleasure;’ but I have been advanced to the charge of a respectable Christian society, by means the most honourable and encouraging; and after an experience of some months, though some have left us, upon the whole, the society is still sufficiently numerous, and my class of young people suffers no diminution. That the salary is not large, gives me little concern. O God, thou knowest that, whatever my failings may be, it is no object with me to make a trade of preaching, or a gain of godliness. I trust, that with food and raiment I should remain content; and that I have never been anxiously solicitous for great things in this life. I have never sought public situation, though it has been my fortune to be placed in the most public.

“ I do not pretend, that in the past year I have employed every hour in the best manner; but it

would be affectation not to admit, that in general my time has been busily, and I trust not unusefully, employed, especially since I have undertaken the charge of the congregation. I have in general made a sermon, drawn up a lecture, and, of late, an exposition, every week, together with occasional forms of prayer, and offices for Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and all this in addition to my usual lectures, some of which have occupied a great deal of my time, particularly Eusebius, Socrates, Ecclesiastical history, and now Josephus.

“ I wish I could reflect with equal satisfaction upon the temper of my mind. I strive to set a guard upon my passions, but they too often burst upon slight occasions into a distressing and alarming extravagance ; and I often feel what I do not express, so that I am sometimes under the most distressing apprehensions with regard to what may happen at some future time.

“ I have also been too negligent of secret devotion. I have indeed almost entirely omitted the forms of worship, but I do not think I have been wise in so doing. I was more happy when I maintained a more habitual communion with God.

“ God and my own heart know that I have many other faults and follies to lament and deplore, which lay a foundation for deep and bitter repentance. O that this may take place before it be too late !

“ I do not at present foresee any material change which is likely to take place, unless any public convulsion should give an unexpected turn to affairs. Dr. Priestley solicits me to go to America, and I

sometimes wish myself there ; but I see no proper call to leave a situation of some usefulness, and to go to bury myself in the American wildernesses. At present it appears plainly to be my duty to remain at my post, and to wait the issue of the great changes which will ere long take place.

“ If I had that unwavering testimony of conscience which would enable me to place entire confidence in God, I should feel perfectly easy and tranquil ; but in proportion as dark suspicion and painful doubts harass and distress my mind, my trust in Divine Providence diminishes, and my prospects are overcast.”

“ Sunday, February 1.—I preached this morning from Matt. v. 3 : ‘ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God ;’ and the sacramental address was framed upon the Christian principle of self-denial. I had not time to correct my sermon as I could have wished ; but the address expressed the sentiments I wished to convey with more interest and force.

“ I labour under a very strong habitual depression of spirits, in some degree no doubt constitutional, but occasioned by the gloomy prospects which still seem to lie before me. I am, it is true, minister of a congregation ; but I do not feel as I used to do with respect to it. Many who attend I see only on the Lord’s-day, and never even exchange a word with them at other times. Some few are personal friends. I feel regret, but I hope neither surprise nor resentment, that some who attended have deserted the place, partly from disgust—partly from dissatisfaction with my sentiments. There was a

time when I myself should have thought it right to desert such a ministry as that which I now exercise. Others have an equal right. I follow the dictates of conscience : so do they.

“ I ought to hold more regular intercourse with the Supreme Being, and a more regular government of my own spirit. I am sure that if I were more watchful in this respect, I should enjoy much more peace of mind than I can at present pretend to, or hope for.”

“ January 1st (1796).—Through the past year nothing particular has happened to myself. I have enjoyed much personal, domestic, and social felicity. The circle of friendship has been enlarged, and the means of intellectual and moral improvement continued.

“ The institution will certainly be given up at Midsummer. I rejoice at it, both because I cannot conduct it as I wish, and because I shall be at liberty, after that time, to pursue employments which, I trust, will be more useful. I have no doubt that I shall be, and am, much blamed by many who know not the difficulties I have to struggle with ; but my conscience acquits me, and I can appeal to the omnipresent God for the purity of my intentions, and the fidelity of my exertions. But the constitution of the house was radically wrong, and could not be mended, and the debt was a millstone about its neck.

“ I cannot sufficiently admire the goodness of Divine Providence in not leaving me destitute. In all the changes through which I have hitherto passed in life, I have never been under the necessity of quitting one situation without finding another

ready to receive me. I have now a congregation numerous and respectable, and my class of young people increases every week. This is far beyond my expectation ; and if I am honoured as the instrument of doing good, my end is answered. God forbid that I should ever be governed by the desire of popularity or of gain. I sometimes fear that my motives are not so pure as I wish them to be ; but I endeavour always to write and speak as in the presence of God.

“ The duties of my profession are my chief employment and delight. Prayers, expositions, sermons, lectures, all afford me great pleasure, especially the latter. I flatter myself that the seed will produce a joyful increase. At least ‘my work is with the Lord, and my reward is with my God.’

“ This year has been remarkable for the declaration which many have made of their unbelief in the Christian religion, and for desertions from the ministry. Among the latter are —————, some of whom have been educated at this institution. These events have raised a great outcry against Unitarianism, and against me in particular, as being either an unbeliever, or at least indifferent to the Christian religion. These reports do not stagger my faith, nor hurt my mind. God knows how little foundation they have in truth, and my own conscience bears witness to the faithfulness with which I have laboured in the cause of genuine Christianity.

“ Nevertheless, these events have given me the deepest concern ; and I have been preaching a set of sermons on the causes of infidelity. I often

argue with the young men, who visit me, upon the subject of the Christian religion, but I have not much hope of success. I hope at least that I may be able to save my own soul.

“ I look forward with some degree of anxiety to the events of the year upon which I have now entered. I shall be placed in a situation entirely new. I shall be a housekeeper with nothing to depend upon but my salary, and the interest of my little property. I doubt whether this is sufficient. I sometimes think of taking one or two divinity students, and sometimes of reading lectures in London upon Metaphysics and Morals. I must be governed by circumstances, and wait the course of events.

“ I foresee some agreeable circumstances and rejoice in them. I shall be delivered from much anxiety of mind, and from that insupportable burden which presses upon me, from the impossibility of counteracting the pernicious tendency of the original errors in the plan of the institution, and of forming the young men to those wise and virtuous habits which are essential to their credit, improvement, and happiness.

“ I also hope to be placed in circumstances more favourable to my own peace of mind ; to the extinction of those habits which I desire to subdue, and to my improvement in wisdom and virtue.

“ I think it would be advisable to be more regular and systematic in my devotions ; and I propose, the first Sunday in every month, to review the transactions of the preceding month, and to enter my reflections in this book. I began the last year with the same design, but did not adhere to it.

“In all I do or propose, I desire to set God before me. If he honours me as the instrument of usefulness I shall esteem it the highest favour that can be conferred upon me. If he lay me aside, or permit me to be exposed to neglect or contempt, I bow to his sovereign disposal. ‘Send, I pray thee, by whom thou wilt send;’ thou knowest the heart of thy servant, the purity of my intention, the ardour of my zeal; and if the cause of truth and virtue be carried on, I will rejoice in it, though I am not employed as the instrument of its success. I am willing to retire, that others better qualified may succeed; but while life, health, and capacity are continued, I will decline no opportunity which occurs of advancing the cause of truth, the good of my fellow-creatures, and the glory of God, whatever may be the issue of my sincere and faithful, though feeble and often ineffectual exertions.”

“Grove Place, July 3d, Sunday evening.—The College is dissolved, and last night, for the first time, I took up my residence in this house.

“I meet with some things that are unpleasant, and am at times subject to painful anxiety, but I thank God my spirits are better than they used to be, and my situation is far beyond any thing I expected when I left Daventry. I have served God, and I have found him a kind Master.

“I have increased in knowledge and experience, and particularly in my acquaintance with the New Testament, which I have diligently studied—I have lost something in the devotional turn of my mind, which I lament, and must endeavour to recover. But my present situation gives me advantages,

which I did not before possess. O that I may improve them !”

“Sunday, January 8.—Through the past year I have enjoyed health, without the interruption of a single hour. I am placed in a situation in all respects desirable. My outward concerns have been as prosperous as could reasonably be expected. I have had many friends. I have enjoyed great means of intellectual and moral improvement. I should be ungrateful if I was not very thankful.

“But all this is not happiness, and I know the reason why I am not happy—I have not a well-governed mind. I have some external trials ; but, if every thing was right within, external irritations would have no effect. It would give me great pleasure if I could see reason, upon reflection, to say that the state of my mind is upon the whole better than it was twelve months ago. But I fear that impartial justice will decide against me. At least there is no improvement. I have one apology, and I tremble to think of it. I will hope that my alarms are groundless.

“I look forward to the events of the year with some anxiety ; I have some apprehensions from public affairs. I doubt whether my seminary will succeed ; whether I shall be useful in my public capacity. I see, in some persons, jealousies against me, which are not pleasing. My desire is to pass through the world, if possible, easily and quietly. I am at a loss to discover why some persons are so very hostile to me. But I desire to improve it as a motive to vigilance, that I may ‘give no occasion to the enemy to blaspheme.’ I foresee no material

event likely to take place, but desire in all things to be prepared for all, and to be wholly resigned to the Divine will.”

“ Wednesday, April 26.—I have this day finished my forty-seventh year. The goodness of God to me is as distinguished as it is unmerited. How many are cut off in the prime of life ! Through Divine goodness, my health has been almost uninterrupted. Except the short fever which I had at Daventry, I have hardly known what illness or pain was ; and this is the more merciful as I am much afraid of sickness, and very apprehensive lest I should not behave properly under it. The manner in which Divine Providence has been pleased to appear for me, and to open proper and comfortable situations in life, in ways and methods totally unexpected, not unfrequently in contradiction to my own wishes, but always, upon the whole, the best ; and the goodness of God in conducting me into my present situation, which is by far the most comfortable that I have yet known, demands the highest gratitude.

“ Much of the journey of life is passed, nor would I wish it to return, unless I might be permitted to avoid the follies and the sins, the recollection of which fills me with wonder, shame, and vain regret.

“ It is now time to do, with all my might, whatever my hand findeth to do ; and God knows I do not wish to spare myself, but should rejoice to devote the remainder of my days to the service of the great cause of truth, by publishing what might be conducive to promote it ; I mean my Lectures,

Expositions, and some other works. But God will dispose of me as he pleases, and if it is for the advantage of his cause that I should be permitted to execute my plans, he will open a way for this purpose: if otherwise, I bow with dutiful submission. 'Send by whom thou wilt send.' Thy gracious cause shall assuredly prevail, whether my feeble services be accepted or not :

'Nor shall my willing soul complain,
Though all its efforts seem in vain ;
Its ample recompense shall be,
But to have wrought, my God, for thee.' DODDRIDGE."

"Lord's-day evening, June 16.—To-day I received the melancholy tidings of the death of my dear friend, Harry Hunt, of Birmingham. He died at Bath, on the 12th instant. Mr. Hunt and I have been intimate friends for upwards of thirty years. He came to the Academy (at Daventry) April 1767, about half a year after me. We were always upon the best terms while fellow-students, and since his removal from Daventry, we have lived upon the footing of cordial friendship. My visits to his house of late years have been peculiarly pleasant, owing to his kindness and hospitality. He was a very intelligent man, of a most generous and feeling heart, and united the temper of a Christian with the manners of a gentleman. Having married a most accomplished lady, he became one of the most excellent, amiable, and useful characters I ever knew. The uncommonly excellent behaviour and amiable manners of his children, who have sustained an irreparable loss, prove that he entertained the justest sentiments upon the subject of education.

They revered him as a parent, and confided in him as a friend. With regard to myself, I hardly had any friend in the world whom I loved with equal affection. His removal deprives me of one of the best sources of consolation which remained to me in this world. I thank God for all the satisfaction I have derived from his friendship, and for the instruction I have learned from his example. I doubt not that his best interest is secure. ‘His life is hidden with Christ in God.’ May it be my happiness to meet him another day with joy and triumph! I heard the melancholy tidings this morning, and in the afternoon I preached from Ps. lxxxix. 48 : ‘What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?’”

In the autumn of this year, Mr. Belsham was strongly urged by the Trustees of Manchester Academy to accept the office of Divinity Tutor, as successor to Dr. Barnes. The proposal was made to him through Dr. Percival, and the terms upon which the situation was offered were liberal and satisfactory. Writing to his friend, the Rev. William Broadbent, he says, “I am so attached to the profession of Tutor in Theology, Morals, and Metaphysics, that, if the Academy had been upon a proper footing, I should certainly have accepted the invitation ;” and the whole of his correspondence with Dr. Percival, and Mr. Yates, his friend and counsellor, shews how much he was inclined to comply with the solicitation of the Trustees. But the institution wanted funds for the support of students in divinity, and it was Mr. Belsham’s decided opinion, that without such funds no insti-

tution of this kind could long maintain its ground. Annual and voluntary subscriptions he considered as inadequate, and too precarious, owing to the declining zeal or capricious dissatisfaction of subscribers whenever the success of the adopted modes of instruction and discipline did not answer their expectations, and he thought the prospect of the permanency of the Manchester College, and of extended usefulness as the presiding Tutor, was not sufficiently clear to justify his resignation of a situation and connexion so agreeable and honourable as that which he enjoyed at Hackney, where his services were so justly appreciated and so well received, and where he had the liberty of expressing and defending his sentiments with the utmost freedom.

In a subsequent letter to his friend at Warrington, he says, “ Your partiality to me leads you to think that the institution would have succeeded under my care. If I had had the same sanguine expectations of success, I would have accepted the offer which was made me, without the smallest hesitation. But the more I think upon it, the more I am convinced that the institution could not have flourished under me. My heresy is by much too obnoxious for any considerable number of persons to have united in supporting a seminary of which I was at the head ; and from the ministers in the neighbourhood, excepting yourself, I had no encouragement. If our excellent friend, Mr. Yates, of Liverpool, who is a man of a sound understanding, and in whose judgment I place great confidence, had testified any thing like the same zeal for my removal to Man-

chester, which he once did for my removal to Warrington, I might, perhaps, have been encouraged to undertake it; but the case was widely different, and with real reluctance I put a negative upon the application.

“ I have no cause to complain of my lot in life, yet I cannot but think it a little whimsical. I believe no person was ever more sincerely desirous than I was to qualify myself for the office of a theological tutor; and when, by taking no small pains, as you yourself will bear witness, I began to acquire a larger stock of ideas upon the subject, a greater facility in performing the duties of my office, and a strong predilection to the profession itself, I have, by these very means, disqualified myself for the office, and in the midst of life my labours are superceded! I am happy, however, in thinking with the great Apostle Paul, that, “ though I am bound, the word of God is not bound.” I reflect with unspeakable satisfaction on the faithful exertions which I have made in the cause of truth and genuine Christianity, and I am contented to be set aside, since such is the pleasure of Divine Providence, and to make room for others, who may be more successful in promoting the great interests of truth and virtue.”

At the conclusion of the year (1797), the following remarks occur in Mr. Belsham's diary :

“ Sunday evening, Dec. 31.—I have as usual many mercies to recollect and be thankful for—the preservation of life, an uninterrupted state of health, protection in journeys, success beyond expectation in every scheme that I have adopted, in my private

seminary, in Saturday-evening lectures, in public services ; numbers undiminished, diligent attendance on Sunday-morning lectures, earnest desire of information, increased kindness of friends, unbounded liberty to express my sentiments. I do not know any Dissenting Minister whose situation is to be compared with my own. How far my instructions are in any degree successful to the extension of knowledge and the promotion of virtue and piety, is best known to Him who is intimately acquainted with the human heart.

“ I have had much labour with my pupils, who engross a great deal of my time in consequence of having no assistant.

“ The death of Mr. Worthington, of Leicester, in good old age, and of Dr. Enfield in the midst of life, are, in their circumstances, events important and affecting.

“ I may mention as one of the remarkable events of the year, that I was applied to from Manchester Academy to succeed Dr. Barnes. I deliberated upon the proposal, and with some reluctance rejected it ; because I was not satisfied with the permanence of the institution, and neither Mr. Yates nor Dr. Barnes encouraged the application.

“ Through the changing year the goodness of God has been unchangeable, and abundant ; but I have not made returns suitable to the growing obligations. I have little reason to say, either that my virtue is more uniform, my conscience more clear, my devotion more fervent, or my hopes more encouraging, than at the beginning of the year. I am continually advancing to a state of retribution, and

to my final account, but I do not proportionally advance in my preparation for it.”

In the midst of his numerous engagements, Mr. Belsham found time to make some remarks upon a publication which excited much attention: “A practical View of the prevailing Systems of professed Christians, &c. By W. Wilberforce, M.P.” This work, from the nature of the doctrine which it was intended to support, and from the name of the author, rather than from any intrinsic merit, or the force of argument by which those doctrines were supported, was calculated to make a great impression upon minds predisposed to admit the sentiments advanced in it, and seemed to require some animadversion. Mr. Belsham thought an opportunity of usefulness presented itself, and willingly entered the field of controversy, for which he was well qualified, both by his knowledge of the subject, and by his official habit of stating and explaining points of doctrine, the arguments by which they were supposed to be established, and the objections which were made to them. Avoiding the formality of polemic discussion, Mr. Belsham chose the more easy and familiar style of epistolary correspondence, and embodied his strictures in a series of letters addressed to a lady,* maintaining the urbanity of a gentleman and a Christian with the precision and logical reasoning of the disputant. Yet this work has been considered by some as written with

* Mrs. Smith, the wife of William Smith, Esq., the representative of the city of Norwich in several successive parliaments, and now venerated for his long-continued efforts in the cause of civil and religious liberty.

a considerable degree of asperity, and gave great offence to many who were far from adopting the views supported by Mr. Wilberforce. Much of this offence, perhaps, arose from the undisguised manner in which Mr. Belsham avowed his sentiments upon some subjects, which thinking and rational Christians were not prepared to discuss, and much prejudice was excited by the openness with which he vindicated the exemption of professed Christians from the obligations of the Mosaic ritual, particularly from the sabbatical observance of the first day of the week. To many this appeared an undermining of an essential part of Christian duty, and a loosening of the bonds of Christian morality, which they apprehended were strengthened by the strict performance of the religious services usually appropriated to that day. But Mr. Belsham had never yielded to the fear of any odium which might arise from the declaration of what he considered to be the truth, and was well assured that no real evil, much less irreligion or immorality, could possibly be connected with the propagation of it."

The following extracts are from letters addressed to two of Mr. Belsham's most intimate friends :

"I am happy to find that you are, upon the whole, so well satisfied with my Reply to Mr. Wilberforce. That you should subscribe to every article in it, is what I do not expect. It is after much laborious inquiry and long hesitation and deliberation, that I have attained that standard of faith, or as some will call it, of unbelief, at which I am now arrived. And I should have been the last person in

the world to have adopted my present sentiments, had I not been placed in circumstances which rendered inquiry necessary, and had I not, with all my early prejudices, imbibed the principle, that truth can never suffer from the fullest investigation, and that all truth must ultimately be favourable to virtue."

"'The Reply' has upon the whole excited more attention than I anticipated; but in some respects it has produced the effect that I expected. To some persons it has given great offence, and some are very much hurt with it. I received a letter from Mr. Robins the other day, full of bitter lamentation. By the way, how glad I should be if we could meet at Daventry! I long to see our worthy friend once more. He is one of the few of my former connexions who is still willing to associate with me upon the terms of friendship. From the generality I experience little more than cold and distant civility, and from some hardly even that. I was at first a little hurt to find myself excluded from the society of those whom I used to love and associate with, and whose friendship I had done nothing to forfeit; but I have seen so much of it, that I am now reconciled to it, and the conduct of the majority makes me set a greater value upon the few friends that I have left, such as yourself and Mr. Robins. I hear that Worthington, Carpenter, and Palmer, all talk of an answer to it. I feel, however, pretty bold upon the subject, which I rather think they do not."

"It gives me pleasure that my review of Mr. Wilberforce met with your approbation. I had the

honour to receive the thanks* of the Unitarian Society at our annual meeting in the Easter week. I think you are perfectly just in your observations upon what I have said concerning the sabbath. There are many who think with us in other things who will dissent from us here. Mr. Wilberforce has revived so much of the old prejudice upon that subject, and such strenuous efforts have been made to enforce the sabbatical observation of the Lord's day, and even to increase the severity of the law upon that subject, that I have thought it expedient to preach two discourses upon it. My propositions are—that the Jewish law of the sabbath is abolished—that no sabbath is enjoined—that the primitive Christians observed the first day of the week as a religious festival—that they did not observe that, or any other day, sabbatically. Upon which I remark, that the Christians' whole time is to be devoted to God—that it is expedient to attend public worship and instruction upon the first day of the week—that the sabbatical observation of that day is inex-

* Moved by the late Samuel Shore, Esq., as appears from the following letter to that gentleman :

“DEAR SIR,

April 14, 1798.

“When I called at your house yesterday, I did not know, what our friend Mr. Lindsey has since communicated in a note, that I am indebted to you for the very honourable notice which was taken by the Unitarian Society of my little volume. I wish it had been more deserving of the praise bestowed upon it by the candour of my friends. It has, however, the merit of being honestly intended to promote the interest of truth and rational Christianity, and that it should have the good fortune to meet with the approbation of those who are most competent to judge of its merits, is one of the highest gratifications which an author can feel.—I am, dear Sir, your obliged and obedient servant,

“T. BELSHAM.”

pedient and unauthorized—that it is highly improper that sabbatical observations should be enforced by civil penalties—that persons who think differently upon this subject ought to exercise candour towards each other. This is the skeleton of my two sermons. How far they may be approved, I know not; but I thought it my duty to teach what I believed to be the true doctrine of Christianity upon the subject of the sabbath, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.”

The following extract from a letter to his friend, the Rev. William Broadbent, will give the reader a correct idea of Mr. Belsham’s notion of the efficacy of prayer, and of its consistency with the belief of the doctrine of necessity.

“ I do not wonder that your friend Mr. B. finds some difficulty upon the subject of prayer. The doctrine of necessity is obviously consistent with expressions of adoration, gratitude, resignation, confidence, and joy;—the only difficulty is upon the subject of petition; but petition is nothing more than the expression of desire, and if it be not wrong to desire, it cannot be improper to express virtuous desires in the presence of God. Desire is the great spring of action in the human mind. Virtuous desires prompt to virtuous conduct. The expression of desire, like that of every other affection, tends to strengthen and encourage it, and consequently tends to the production of those actions which are the objects of desire. Virtuous desires, therefore, frequently expressed in the presence of God, lead to the performance of those actions by which the object of desire is to be obtained; and

this is the only way in which we can rationally expect prayer to be answered. It is never to be supposed that God will deviate from the usual course of his providence, and violate the laws of nature, in answer to the prayers of any of his creatures."

The even tenor of Mr. Belsham's life furnishes no occurrence during this period of any material importance, and the observations which he has entered in his diary at the commencement and close of the year, are very similar to those which have been presented to the reader. On the opening of 1799, he thus describes his feelings, resolutions, and wishes :

"January 1st.—I have entered upon a new year, the events of which what human sagacity can foresee? But I am in the hands of a Being who governs the universe with unlimited authority, and with the most perfect wisdom and benevolence. In those hands I am safe, and surely I shall be ultimately happy. What previous scenes of discipline may be necessary to qualify me for that ultimate state, I know not,—and the prospect of them sometimes fills my mind with painful anxiety.

"I am exceedingly desirous to preserve my passions under proper discipline, and that they may upon no occasion break out into unbecoming warmth and intemperance of language. Constitutionally warm, I know not how to unite that firmness and coolness in which true dignity consists. I must be habitually vigilant. I hope God will mercifully preserve me from the temptations which would overpower my feeble resolutions, my imperfect virtue.

“ While I live, I am desirous of being useful. I am anxious to do my duty to the young people under my care; to promote their moral as well as their intellectual improvement. I am desirous that my public services may be instructive and impressive. I shall endeavour to prepare for them as in the sight of God, and to suffer no improper motives to influence my mind. And earnestly endeavouring after success, I will keep my mind quiet and content with that share of approbation and usefulness which God permits. If I can do little myself, I will endeavour to rejoice if others are more active, more able, and more successful. I am not serving a party; I am not seeking mine own honour and emolument; my object, my sole ambition, is to promote the knowledge of Christ and his genuine gospel.

“ I am desirous to publish my lectures on Metaphysics, but still more my Expositions. I should rejoice to devote my time to the instruction of mankind by condensing the fruit of my labours, and giving them to the world. O God, vouchsafe to accept the willing mind. Thou knowest the heart of thy servant. As long as life, and health, and ability are continued, I would devote all to thee. And if I cannot move in the extensive sphere I wish, I will endeavour to be satisfied with the humble one which is prescribed. Let me not live to myself nor die to myself; but whether I live may I live to the Lord, or whether I die may I die to the Lord. Living or dying, let me be thine, thine entirely, and thine for ever. Amen, amen.”

.. In reviewing the year, Mr. Belsham observes,

“I have lost many friends, but my own health has been uninterrupted by the illness of a day, except now and then a trifling cold. I have been protected in long and hazardous journeys, and have not met with a single accident. I cannot be sufficiently thankful.

“I have much pleasure in public services, and they have been very well attended, especially the lectures that I began in October, upon the history of the first planting of Christianity. We have finished, and have agreed to publish, a collection of Hymns for the use of the congregation. Of the society we have lost some of the most valuable members.

“The train of my public discourses has been chiefly on the doctrine of a future life, which I may some time publish. I have likewise proceeded in the discourses on the Divine attributes, having with some difficulty treated upon the objections to the Divine benevolence: a subject of the most interesting importance.

“I do not think that I have great reason to charge myself with much waste of time, but I lament that I have lost some of those devotional feelings which were once my consolation and delight. I sometimes am troubled with sceptical thoughts; but I am sure it is wise and right to act under the impression of the Divine government, and the awful and glorious expectations of the gospel. Upon the truth of these principles I am willing to embark my dearest interests.—I have to lament many instances of a want of self-government. Where trials have been moderated, I am very thankful; where con-

tinued, I desire to be watchful. He that knoweth my frame will pity and help my infirmities.”

The publication of “A Review of Mr. Wilberforce’s Treatise” introduced Mr. Belsham to the acquaintance and friendship of the Duke of Grafton, whom he occasionally visited. His Grace had himself made some remarks on this celebrated work, but did not proceed when he found it so ably noticed by the subject of this Memoir. Mr. Belsham had mentioned his visit to Wakefield Lodge, and the satisfaction he had experienced in the attentions and conversation of his noble host, in a letter to his respected friend at Daventry. In reply, Mr. Robins says,

“I often thought of you while at Wakefield Lodge, and had no doubt you would be happy there. I reflect with pleasure on the character you draw of your noble host, and heartily wish that his example may provoke many of the same rank to the imitation of his virtues. But, alas! ignorance and bigotry, formality and superstition, on the one hand, and infidelity and dissipation on the other, leave little room for genuine Christianity in the higher ranks among us, while gross vice or wild enthusiasm degrade and deform the lower. O for the general diffusion of the pure and amiable spirit of real Christianity! But how, or by whom, is it to be diffused? Your system appears to be too refined to reach the vulgar, and your opponents’ too harsh to be adopted by the more refined; while the middle scheme is too generally held with a moderation scarcely compatible with that exertion which alone can secure its general success. I have read Wil-

liams's* Letters to you, but I cannot say with pleasure, or even without high disgust in some instances in which his ignorance is as apparent as his acrimony, particularly on the proof of the Divine benevolence from the present state of things. He writes neatly, and with a show of learning as well as zeal, and his book will be read as decisive by many; but he plants his artillery on too high ground to reach his opponent. I wish that a fair combatant, with equal powers with yourself, would enter the field; but where is he to be found? I had some hope from Mr. Carpenter,† but I fear that disuse has rather injured his polemical armour, and especially that ill health and spirits have weakened his former ability and inclination to use it. But whoever are the combatants, I only wish the truth as it is in Jesus to be victorious. And that it will finally triumph over ignorance, error, infidelity, vice, and misery, I have the most assured and delightful hope."

The state of the political world at this time was very alarming, and the conduct of the English government altogether arbitrary and intolerant. Every effort was made to check the exertions of the friends of freedom, and to prevent the diffusion of liberal sentiments. The most violent measures were adopted in regard to individuals who had either the presumption to censure the measures of administration, or the fortitude to contend for the

* Mr. Belsham refers to this work in a passage in his diary, which will hereafter appear.

† The Rev. Benjamin Carpenter, at that time minister at Stourbridge.

rights and privileges of the subject. The same spirit which had excited the disgraceful riots at Birmingham, and driven Dr. Priestley to the shores of America, manifested its hostile disposition towards all who entered the lists in defence of civil or religious liberty, and charges of sedition and treason were instituted wherever there was a pretence for prosecution, or the prospect of establishing the charge of disaffection or disloyalty. Among the numbers who were arrested by the strong and vindictive arm of the Attorney-General, and who fell under the condemnation of unconstitutional laws, sanctioned by the verdict of alarmed or prejudiced juries, was the Rev. Gilbert Wakefield. The Bishop of Landaff had published an address to the people of Great Britain, the avowed object of which was to defend and support the measures of Mr. Pitt and his colleagues in administration.* Upon this Mr. Wakefield published some remarks, written with that spirit of independence, and that ardent zeal in the cause of truth and liberty, which characterized the effusions of his pen. The printer of this indignant reply was not allowed to pass unnoticed, and, though Mr. Wakefield immediately avowed himself the author of the obnoxious pamphlet, did not escape punishment. The author himself was immediately prosecuted as the principal offender, and the result was Mr. Wakefield's imprisonment in the King's Bench, and subsequently for two years in Dorchester jail. This circumstance is mentioned to explain the allusion in the following extract from

* For a full account of this detestable prosecution, see the *Life of Gilbert Wakefield*, Vol. II. Chap. vi.

a letter of Mr. Belsham's to his friend at Warrington. Having mentioned that he preached at Bristol before the Unitarian Society, and after some days proceeded to Exeter, he says,

“Mr. Kenrick and I made a visit to Mr. Wakefield at Dorchester. We found him pale and emaciated, and complaining very much of the languor of confinement, which made him incapable of steady application; but he was in very good spirits, and his mind is unbroken. He says there is a Greek proverb, that God's mill grinds slow, but it grinds small, and he has no doubt that Mr. Pitt and his friends will in due time be ground to powder.

“When I was at Exeter, I also had an opportunity of seeing Mr. Evanson, so celebrated in the theological world for his attack upon three of the evangelists, and upon the sabbatical observation of the Lord's-day. He is settled within a short distance of Exeter, and is a very learned, a very pleasant, and a very intelligent man. I knew him twenty years ago, when he was curate of Tewkesbury, but should not have recollected him, nor he me. He has lately begun to preach again, and has officiated for Mr. Jervis, of Lympson, where he resides.”

Though there be a great similarity in some of the remarks and expressions in the following extracts, they are so descriptive of the writer's mind and feelings at a period which he considered as highly interesting and important, that it is presumed they will be deemed acceptable by the reader.

“Wednesday evening, Jan. 1st.—I have entered upon a new year. I foresee few events of an inte-

resting nature, though probably some unexpected ones will take place in the course of it. I propose a journey into the West in the summer, and am to preach at Bristol at the Unitarian meeting. I have my daily employment in teaching pupils, and my weekly labour of a sermon, an exposition, and a lecture. This (the latter) would be my delight, but altogether they press me down.

“I am in considerable forwardness with my lectures on Metaphysics, which I hope to complete before the end of January. I am desirous of publishing a volume of Sermons, my Expositions, and my Sunday Lectures. Perhaps, if I live till the next vacation, I may be able to do something. I can do nothing while my young people are with me. I am sometimes inclined to give up my pupils entirely, and to cast myself and my labours on the care of Providence. But I fear this would be to tempt, and not to trust, Providence. And possibly I may value my labours too highly, or at least what I write may be published when I am no more. I am desirous of being useful in my generation, and of employing for the benefit of my fellow-creatures the talents with which I am intrusted. I may be called to my account before I am aware, and God forbid that I should be found a slothful and unfaithful servant, wasting my master’s property, or neglecting to improve it.

“I preach speculatively more than any person in my system of thinking. It is my desire to instruct, to establish, and to infuse valuable practical principles. Some are offended: and of these, some are my oldest friends, who were attached

to me, but now look shy upon me ; and what is worse, some are disturbed in their habits of thinking, and either talk inconsistently, or become unbelievers. And these are not the youngest of my hearers. This often leads me to consider, whether my mode of instruction is just and proper ; and upon the whole I think it right to proceed as I have done. For, surely, I am not to decline entering a protest against established corruptions, because some confound those corruptions with Christianity itself. Besides, though the seed sometimes falls upon stony ground, or among thorns, or where there is little depth of earth, yet it sometimes falls on good ground, and produces fruit. My hearers are certainly more numerous in consequence of the freedom of my language. Few congregations attend better, while, at the same time, I have no pretence to eloquence. And some of my hearers express their gratitude for my discourses, and treat me with affection and respect. And I rejoice to see that many are eminent for piety and virtue, as well as for just sentiments in religion.

“Several answers have appeared to my letter on Mr. Wilberforce. Two by Fellows of Trinity College, Dublin, and another is expected ; one by Mr. Palmer, on the Sabbath ; and one from a Mr. Williams. I have not noticed them, and I know not that I shall. I hate personal altercation, and am loth to enter the field of controversy ; yet I would not desert the cause of truth.

“I desire to govern my conduct as in the sight of God, and as accountable to him, mindful of the brevity and frailty of life, and acting under the im-

pression of the awful expectations to which I am raised by the gospel. I have reason to be very thankful for the mercies of the last year. ‘God hath delivered, and doth deliver; I trust that he will still deliver.’ He will give me, if not affluence, which perhaps would be injurious, at least ‘day by day my daily bread.’ I foresee no particular trials that are likely to befall me; but I pray to be prepared for whatever may happen. I desire to be found at the post of duty; not to give unnecessary offence, nor to shrink from any service, however perilous or unpopular. My God, keep me from dangerous temptations, and enable me to resist and vanquish those which I may be called to encounter. He knows the difficulties of my situation, which at times are almost beyond my strength to support. But he has preserved me thus far, even beyond expectation, and I pray that my ‘patience may have its perfect work;’ that a deep sense of my own imperfection may preserve me from unjust severity on the failings of others.

“O God, I desire to have no will but thine. Deal with thy servant as seemeth good in thy sight. May I feel no other solicitude than that of performing to the best of my ability the duties of my station, and of being finally approved and accepted by thee. This I beg for thine infinite mercy’s sake. Amen.”

“April 26.—I have this day completed my fiftieth year. I cannot suffer half a century of life to close without expressing my gratitude to the Author and Preserver of life, that in so long a course of years I have suffered so little and enjoyed so much;

and had I been wiser and better I had enjoyed still more, and suffered still less. It is now high time to awake out of sleep. The space before me is very short in comparison with that which is now past, and which in the review appears like a waking dream. O that the remaining years, whether more or less, might be wholly employed in the practice of virtue, in doing good, and in serving God! With regard to events, I look forward with some anxiety. But every thing has hitherto been so much better than my expectation, that I ought not to doubt the continued kindness of Divine Providence. I will hope for thy salvation, and do thy commandments."

The following letter was addressed to Mrs. Harry Hunt, the widow of his lamented friend, on the death of an amiable and accomplished daughter :

"DEAR MADAM,

"Allow me to express my sincere and tender sympathy and condolence with you and Miss Brailsford, and my young friends, under the late awful visitation of Divine Providence. Nature will and should have its course, and under heavy afflictions, tears, by the wise Author of the human constitution, are appointed as a natural and mechanical relief. But though the feelings of a parent upon the removal of a child in the bloom of life, who concentrated in herself all that adorns and dignifies human nature, must be exquisitely painful, I am too well acquainted with the firmness of my friend's mind, and the practical effect of her

Christian principles, to entertain the least apprehension of any thing unbecoming the calm dignity and pious resignation of the Christian character, either in her thoughts or language, upon this trying occasion. And my fervent prayers are united with hers, that as it has pleased the Supreme Disposer of events to visit her with peculiar trials, he will vouchsafe peculiar support; and that where tribulation abounds consolation may much more abound.

“I have been highly gratified and edified to hear of the solemn and tranquil manner in which my young friend took her last farewell of her near relatives.* What she said upon this distressing occasion cannot fail to have made the most valuable and permanent impression upon the heart, and will no doubt be of the most essential use, both to fix the principles of virtue, and to administer the balm of comfort. Indeed, Madam, I am sure that you cannot but feel, amidst this melancholy scene, that ‘we do not sorrow as those who have no hope.’ We part with one dear friend after another in the holy and glorious expectation of being in a short time united to them again, in a state of consummate virtue, love, and happiness. Of what unspeakable value is the Christian Revelation, by which we are elevated to this hope!

“But I will not trespass any longer upon your

* Miss Sarah Hunt died on Sunday morning, the 11th May, after having taken solemn farewell of the whole family, whom she called to her bedside; when she had done this, she said, “Now I am ready,” and, after a short struggle, departed, in the nineteenth year of her age.

time and feelings. My sister unites with me in respectful compliments and affectionate condolence. Please to present my best respects to Miss Brailsford, and kind remembrances to Harry and John. They were always dutiful, and will now feel a double obligation, by an increased and affectionate assiduity, as far as in them lies, to make up the last irreparable loss. I am, dear Madam, with true and affectionate sympathy and respect, your obedient servant,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.

“*May 23, 1800.*”

At the conclusion of the year, Mr. Belsham continues his observations :

“December 31.—Through the goodness of God I am now brought to the close of another year, which has been marked with as few unpleasing circumstances, and crowned with as many blessings, as any year in past life. And this is the more extraordinary, and the more worthy of distinguishing gratitude, as it has been a year of unparalleled national distress, in consequence of the great scarcity of bread and the unexampled high price of provisions. I have suffered no personal evil, excepting for a few days in the month of August, being affected with severe rheumatism in the face ; nor have I been under the necessity of putting on mourning for a single friend ; nor have I accompanied any of my congregation, old or young, to the grave ; nor has there been any remarkable instance of mortality among my friends, or even my common acquaintance. The lives of some have, indeed, been

threatened; but upon the whole there have been fewer breaches upon my social connexions than I ever remember to have known.

“The business of the year has proceeded in the usual way. I have had no regular set of subjects for the pulpit, but have finished my discourses on the attributes of God. In the lectures the subjects have been, the Positive Institutions of Christianity, and the various English Versions of the Old and New Testament.

“I see much that is right and worthy of approbation in my temper and conduct; but I also see much, very much that is amiss—old and stubborn habits of affections and conduct, that are not subdued.

“Upon the whole I have great reason to review the past year with much gratitude, as to myself a season of abounding comfort, when to others it has been a season of unexampled distress.”

In this year Mr. Belsham published a Sermon, addressed to the young people at Hackney, entitled, “A Serious Caution against Popular Errors;” of which he says, in a letter to a friend, “You may guess it is not calculated to please the orthodox, much less the moderés.”

As Mr. Belsham expected, this Sermon gave great offence to some, and the sentiments expressed in it were strongly reprobated, even by those who ought to have better known the author’s design and object. One, indeed, of his old and intimate friends did not hesitate to assert, that he had misrepresented the opinions which he exposed and controverted, and that he knew he had misrepresented

them. From this charge Mr. Belsham warmly defended himself in a letter to his friend, appealing to his knowledge of his character and disposition, and calling upon him to retract the unfounded charge; with what effect does not appear. Certainly the spirit manifested on this occasion by the reputedly orthodox, or those who considered themselves such, was far from that Christian "charity which thinketh no evil." The irritation which was evinced by the few remaining advocates of Arianism, or what passed for Arianism, betrayed a want of confidence in the truth of their system, as much as the morbid sensibility of their temper, and served rather to promote than to counteract the success of those efforts which they wished to discourage, and were so ready to denounce.

It was not to be expected that Mr. Belsham's zeal in the cause of Unitarianism, or his writings in its defence, would escape animadversion. The late Archbishop of Dublin, then in the infancy of his fame, if not of his knowledge of the subject, was meditating an attack upon what he considered the heresy of the day. In a letter before referred to, Mr. Belsham says, "I hear that Mr. Magee, a fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, is preparing a great work, which is to cut up Unitarianism by the roots—I am to be demolished in a note, and Dr. Priestley is to be ground to atoms in the text. *Parturient montes.*" This work, which is thus jocosely noticed, soon after appeared, but was never directly answered by Mr. Belsham. At a distant period, the disingenuous citations from the writings of Mr. Belsham and other Unitarians, the gross

misrepresentations, and the inconclusive reasoning of the author, were fully exposed and ably refuted by the Rev. Dr. Carpenter.

Mr. Belsham's love of truth, and his ardour in promoting the diffusion of it, led him to devise various plans of promoting its reception and influence. Among these, was the delivery of private lectures to the young people of his congregation. The manifest advantage derived from these lectures excited a desire that they might be more public, and Mr. Belsham was ever ready to meet the wish for further information and instruction. Towards the close of the year, in his correspondence with one of his friends, he says, "I have lately, by the desire of some of the principal members of the congregation, delivered my lectures upon Christian doctrine in the meeting, after the morning service. I allow five minutes for those of the society to leave the place who choose it. I then go into the table-pew, and deliver the lecture to those who remain. Hitherto I have had upwards of one hundred hearers ; but the thing is new. How long this zeal will hold I cannot guess ; but while people are willing to hear, I think it a duty to teach. I trust that some of the seed, though scattered at random, may in due time, with a divine blessing, produce fruit. My present subject is the Pre-existence of Christ ; and my plan is to examine all the texts that are produced in favour of that doctrine, and to give the Unitarian interpretation of them. I am persuaded that Unitarian principles are advancing with no small rapidity in this part of the world, among a description of persons who are the most respec-

table class of society ; I mean those who are neither very poor nor very rich.”

On the publication of his expected work, Dr. Magee sent a copy, accompanied by a polite note, to Mr. Belsham, which he acknowledged by the following letter :

To the Rev. Dr. MAGEE,
Trinity College, Dublin.

“ SIR,

“ I am obliged to you for the present of your late publication, and for the polite letter with which it was accompanied. It appears to be a work of great industry and acuteness, which I shall peruse with great attention and interest.

“ I am not at all ambitious of the character of a dexterous polemic. I profess myself a sincere inquirer after truth, and thankful for information, in whatever language or manner it may be conveyed. Whatever principles I embrace after due inquiry, I make no hesitation to avow, assigning the reasons which influence my own judgment, and leaving them to make their proper impression upon the minds of others.

“ Happy would it be for the Christian world, if Christians who hold different opinions in religion, could think and speak favourably of each other. I see no reason why theological discussions should not be conducted with the same good temper and good manners, which are observed in moral and philosophical disquisitions. Of this spirit your late amiable and learned Primate set an eminent and edifying example. That example I should

study to imitate, if upon any future occasion I should find leisure and inclination to reply to the animadversions with which you have been pleased to honour my Review of Mr. Wilberforce; and I trust that, whatever conviction I may entertain of the truth or importance of the opinions I defend, my zeal will never betray me into the use of language unbecoming a Christian, a scholar, or a gentleman. With the best wishes for your health and happiness, I am, &c.,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.”

Mr. Belsham's opinion of this celebrated work, after he had given it his more careful and deliberate attention, may be seen in the following extracts from a letter to his friend the Rev. William Broadbent :

“I have at length received Dr. Magee's book with a very polite letter from himself, which I mean to answer very soon. Dr. Magee writes like one who has newly begun to study divinity, and who can discover no flaws in his favourite hypothesis. Sometimes he appears to write for the sake of victory rather than of truth. He has laid himself very open to the animadversions of those who understand the subject; but his confidence, his sarcasms, and his parade of learning, in which, however, he betrays disgraceful deficiency, will, to superficial thinkers of his own party, make his work appear unanswerable. I have but little time to write any thing, and I have but a very low idea of the use of theological controversy, which soon degenerates into personal abuse and rancour; so that I do not

think I shall ever make a direct reply. What notice I may hereafter take of this, and of other answers to my ‘Review of Mr Wilberforce,’ must depend upon circumstances.”

About this time Dr. Priestley was preparing “Notes on the Bible,” and a continuation of his “History of the Christian Church,” for publication. Mr. Belsham exerted himself with much success to procure subscriptions to defray the expense of printing these valuable works. In a circular letter addressed to those who were supposed to be favourable to this object, it is stated, “that the main design of the contribution is to make him happy for the remainder of his days, by enabling him, without injury to himself or to his family, to prosecute an undertaking upon which his heart is set, and by convincing him, that his friends on this side the Atlantic, who once professed a regard for him, still retain the veneration due to his character, his merits, and his sufferings.” The amount of the contribution exceeded £1300 ; and it must have been a high gratification to the subject of this Memoir, that he mainly effected this expression of regard for his venerable and honoured and expatriated friend.

The death of Elias Bent, of Warrington, Esq., in the course of this year, was a subject of sincere regret to his numerous friends. Mr. Belsham justly appreciated his character and worth. Referring to this event, he says, “What an invaluable privilege is the gospel, which excites the blessed hope of a resurrection to immortal life ! When we consider what it is to rise from the grave after

the long interval of insensibility, the glorious expectation seems too magnificent for such mean and momentary beings as we are to indulge ; but the evidences of the gospel challenge the most assured assent ; and ‘ if we believe that Jesus died and rose again,’ we cannot hesitate to admit the glorious consequence, ‘ that them also, who sleep in Jesus, shall God bring with him.’”

Mr. Belsham suggests the like consolation to James Rich, Esq., of Thornes House, near Wakefield, M. P., on the death of his lady, well known in the fashionable world as Mrs. Milnes of Piccadilly, of whom he observes, in communicating the intelligence of this event to the Morning Chronicle, “ The elegance of her manners and the splendour of her hospitality have been generally celebrated, while her many private and domestic virtues, her unaffected piety, her generous sympathy, her friendly assiduity, and her unlimited acts of benevolence, endeared her to a very extensive circle of relations and friends, upon whose minds the present mournful event has impressed sentiments of deep and indelible regret.”

Though a generation has passed away, the disgraceful riots at Birmingham in the year 1791, are in the recollection of many who are now living. It is well known, that the fury of the mob was early directed against the meeting-house in which Dr. Priestley officiated, which was soon burnt, and razed to the ground. At a proper season, when the spirit of anarchy and bigotry, misnamed loyalty, and zeal for Church and King, had given way to a better feeling, preparations were made for erecting a new

chapel. The building was completed and opened in 1802 ; and Mr. Belsham was invited to officiate on the occasion. In a letter before the writer he says, “ I preached at Birmingham July 22nd, at the opening of the New Meeting, to a very large audience. Mr. Scholfield computed there were sixteen hundred people in the place, and hundreds went away for want of room. My text was 2 Cor. vi. 16—18 verses. My subject, ‘ The Right and Duty of Unitarian Christians to form themselves into separate Societies for Religious Worship.’* In the exordium, in which I thought it right to allude to the late riots, and to the situation of Dr. Priestley, I found it difficult to command my feelings ; but I grew better as I proceeded in my discourse, and got through the service with greater ease than I expected ; for since I began to preach, there never was a service to which I looked forward with greater apprehension.”

In acknowledging the receipt of a copy of this Sermon, a friend had made some observations on the use of the term Unitarian. Mr. Belsham’s

* In this discourse, written with great care and ability, Mr. Belsham displays his usual discrimination and candour, and strongly states the ground of Unitarian dissent, not only from established creeds and forms of ecclesiastical discipline, but from those modes of worship adopted by various sects of Christians, who address religious homage to any other than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This Sermon, and the prayer at the conclusion of the service, were published at the request of the subscribers to the New Meeting, who particularly desired that he would include that part of the concluding prayer of the afternoon service, in which he so respectfully remembered the Rev. John Edwards ; a just testimony of their affection for their late pastor.

reply explains and justifies the definite sense which he had affixed to it:—“I observe that you complain, like Mr. Robins; that I use the term Unitarian in too restricted a sense, not including Arians. The fact is, that I have said nothing at all about Arians in my Birmingham Sermon, nor was it in the least degree to my purpose to notice them. All that I meant to establish was this; that such Unitarians as I described, could not conscientiously join in the worship of the Established Church, or of the great mass of professing Christians. With regard to the Arian system, if they can be called Arians who only plead for the simple pre-existence, which, however, is no more Arianism than it is Mahometanism, I look upon them to be as much Unitarians as myself. I only object, that they hold a doctrine useless in itself, improbable, and unknown both to scripture and to all antiquity; and indeed, I may say, to all modern times till the eighteenth century. But if an Arian believes that Jesus is the Maker and Governor of the world, however he may palliate his opinions to himself, he ascribes those works to a creature, which, in my view, true philosophy and the Jewish and Christian revelation ascribe and appropriate to God; and therefore, in my judgment, he is not a true Unitarian; by which I mean, one who refuses to ascribe to any creature the attributes, the works, or the worship, which is due only to the Supreme.”

At the close of this year, the congregation assembling in the Gravel-pit meeting were called upon to elect an afternoon preacher in the room of the Rev. John Kentish, who had received an invi-

tation to Birmingham. Their views were immediately directed to Mr. Belsham, and an almost unanimous request was made to him to accept the office. He was aware that his numerous engagements would render this an arduous service, and at first resolved to decline the invitation ; but urged by some of his friends, who represented to him the importance of preserving the unanimity of the society, he consented, and signified his acceptance by the following letter :

TO THE MEMBERS AND SUBSCRIBERS OF THE CONGREGATION ASSEMBLING FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP AT THE GRAVEL-PIT MEETING, HACKNEY.

“MY CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

“I feel much indebted to you for the unsolicited, and, indeed, unexpected honour which you have conferred upon me in electing me to supply the vacancy for the afternoon service, occasioned by the resignation of my able and much regretted colleague, Mr. Kentish.

“Possessing, and pretending to no other claim to this distinction than that of teaching unequivocally, and without reserve, those sublime truths of our holy religion, which lie at the foundation of all virtuous practice and Christian hope, and of endeavouring, to the best of my ability, to extricate the pure doctrine of Christ from that mass of error with which it is so generally blended, and by which it has been disfigured and disgraced, I regard it as the pride and happiness of my life to be connected with a Christian society, which not only permits the most unrestrained simplicity and plainness of

speech, but which even crowns this freedom with the most flattering tokens of its approbation and favour.

“I accept, therefore, with gratitude, yet not without a considerable degree of anxiety, this fresh public testimony of your approbation and esteem. And while I discharge the additional duties of the important office which you have assigned to me, as a faithful minister of Christ, whose primary object is to promote the knowledge of truth and the practice of duty, I shall rely with confidence upon the continuance of that candour which I have hitherto so abundantly experienced. And humbly imploring and depending upon that blessing from above, which alone can command success, I trust that our present happy connexion will prove the earnest of a more glorious one in that day, when we shall meet each other at the tribunal of our great Master and Judge. I am, my Christian friends, with great affection and regard, your faithful, humble, and obliged servant, in the bonds of our common Christianity,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.”

“*Hackney, Dec. 26th, 1802.*”

Mr. Belsham records the events of the year and his remarks upon them in his diary, as follows :

“January 5.—I have been spending a little time in calling to remembrance the events of the past year, (1801,) in the review of which I have great reason to acknowledge that goodness and mercy have continually accompanied my steps.

“ In the beginning of January I had a severe fever for a few days ; but I bless God the symptoms were at no time alarming, and it soon left me. I have occasionally had a cold, and have been attacked with rheumatic pains, but upon the whole I have had no considerable interruption of health.

“ This year has been marked by the death of some valuable friends ; Mr. Smith, of Bedford, in the spring,* and Mr. Wakefield on the 7th September. This last was a very affecting event. From his splendid talents great usefulness might have been expected. But the great Arbiter of events ‘ has no need of man’s work or of his own gifts.’†

* Mrs. Lindsey, who was frequently Mr. Belsham’s correspondent, thus expresses herself, probably in reference to some account Mr. Belsham had given her of this event, and of the state of the congregation as connected with it :

“ Your accounts of the improvements at Bedford are very pleasing, and shew that human affairs are in considerable progression ; and there can be no doubt but the mental process, though less visible, is more abundantly so, and you only want a stronger practical faith in your own principles to feel it as invariably so as we do. One light must go out that another more bright may shine in its proper time. A practical Necessarian looks beyond the present moment without dismay.”

† Mr. Wakefield fell a victim to the unjust punishment which had been inflicted upon him for the free expression of his opinions. The persecuting and tyrannical character of the government at this period can never be too severely reprobated. The friend of liberty mourns over the many advocates of her cause who were sacrificed to the bigotry and infatuation of the prevailing faction. Mr. Wakefield’s was not a mind to bend in silence to the arbitrary measures of a minister, nor to share the sycophancy of the ecclesiastic ; and whatever might be the warmth with which he censured the despotism of the one, or the adulation of the other, his character as a man and a Christian, and his talents and acquirements as a scholar, ought to have

“I have this year been chosen one of Dr. Williams’s Trustees, and took my seat at the board on Wednesday, December 30th.

“My congregation has been in a flourishing state. Though some families drop off and leave us, others are succeeding them. I have finished the course of sermons on the Divine Attributes; and I have, at the request of many of my friends, begun to deliver a course of lectures on the Person of Christ, on Sunday mornings, after the service in the meeting. It is well attended, and I hope may do good. At least I trust that it is well meant, and as such will be accepted.

“I have now entered upon another year, and I look forward to the events of it with a considerable degree of anxiety and alarm. Mr. Lindsey has had

protected him from any charge of disloyalty or disaffection, and from the merciless rigour with which the unjust laws, then enacted against sedition and libel, were enforced. His long imprisonment of two years injured his constitution and rendered him unequal to that bodily exercise to which he had been accustomed, and he sank under a fever brought on by exertions to which his impaired strength was unequal. His death was undoubtedly the consequence of his severe punishment for uttering opinions, the truth and justice of which few would now be hardy enough to deny.

He was a man of multifarious learning, and of great zeal in the cause of literature; and he ardently strove to apply this learning to the elucidation of the Sacred Scriptures, of which his admiration was unbounded. Too sanguine and imaginative, he was sometimes betrayed into improper confidence in conjectural criticism, but no one was more ready to acknowledge his error, when perceived, or to retract it. Besides the valuable contribution he made to classical literature by his splendid edition of Lucretius, had not his life been prematurely closed, he would probably have conferred more important and lasting obligations on the present and future age. For an account of his trial and the result, see the Memoirs of his life, Vol. II. ch. vi. and following.

two paralytic strokes ; Mr. Rickards, a violent seizure of the same kind, last Wednesday ; and Dr. Geddes has been for a twelvemonth struggling with a diarrhœa. It is next to impossible that these excellent men should hold out through the year which is now beginning. The removal of each will be afflictive, but the loss of Mr. Lindsey will be irreparable.

“ The state of my congregation astonishes me much. I never pretended to eloquence, nor affected, or in the least degree expected, popularity. I was solicitous to perform my duty and to publish plainly the truths, the knowledge of which I had acquired, by the blessing of God upon persevering exertion. God has raised me to distinction, and to a considerable degree of affluence, and even of popularity. I trust I shall be encouraged by it to proceed in the same path ; and I earnestly pray that my motives may remain perfectly pure ; and if ever I deviate from the strict line of duty for the sake of popular applause or secular advantage, I pray God that I may be disappointed and forsaken.

“ N.B. In the events of the year I forgot to mention the publication of my Moral Philosophy in the month of July. On the 26th October, my worthy friend Mr. Bent, of Warrington, died, after an illness of about six weeks, of typhus fever. He had spent a day with me in the month of September, when Mr. Wakefield was dying, an event which appeared to affect him much.”

“ Monday evening, April 26.—I have this day finished my fifty-second year. I look back with wonder at the vast space of life which I have already

passed, and I look forward to futurity with some degree of apprehension and alarm, both when I consider how very short a period of life now lies before me, and the uncertainty of what shall take place when this busy, anxious scene is over. I see much to be thankful for, and much to regret; something to hope, and something to fear. Upon the whole, my lot has not been cast, all things considered, in pleasant places. Mistakes at the outset of life, some of which originated in good principles and good dispositions, have, nevertheless, produced permanent pernicious effects in my character and circumstances. The discipline of life, the professing and teaching of good principles, has not brought my mind into that state which affords either very pleasing reflections or joyful anticipations; and I have great reason to apprehend my sun will set in clouds, perhaps of the darkest kind. But I would not distrust Providence. It has often extricated me from scenes of the greatest danger and alarm, and compassed me about with ‘songs of deliverance,’ when I expected nothing but darkness and misery. Nevertheless, that man is pronounced happy who feareth always, and in this, if any where, my safety lies. I am desirous of being useful while I live, especially in promoting the cause of truth. It is only in this way that I can do good. But there are circumstances which greatly discourage me, and which make me sometimes think, that the less I stand forward in public the better. But the die is cast; and, having begun, I must persevere.

“What numbers of persons who began life with me, have long since been cut off! My brother, my

sister, some of my schoolfellows and fellow-students, my class-fellows and intimate friends, beside the whole generation which preceded me, my parents, all my relations, instructors, &c. I am myself declining into the vale of years. I feel weaknesses coming on, and yet I feel unwilling to believe I am growing old. What a strange riddle is human life ! I am unwilling to think, what I know must be the case, that others think and feel with regard to me, as I thought and felt, thirty years ago, of my seniors, who have long since been in their graves ;— and my season of action, enjoyment, and usefulness must very soon be over ; and who can say what will then take place ? O that I might, if possible, so live as to be prepared for whatever may happen ! My prospects, at present, are cloudy. So I have often thought them, but God has interposed, and advanced me from one situation to another, till at last I have been fixed in that which I now occupy, and which is one, all things considered, so eligible, so honourable, so useful and comfortable, as at one time I should not have presumed to aspire to. ‘ Why, then, art thou cast down, O my soul ? Trust in God, for I shall yet praise him ! ’ ”

In contrast with these melancholy reflections it will appear, as was well known to his friends, that this was far from being the habitual state of Mr. Belsham’s mind. In society and in his correspondence he usually manifests far more cheerful and lively feelings. This is evident in the following passage from a letter to his friend Mr. Broadbent, Sept. 10. He had been congratulating him on the success of his seminary, and the profits arising from it, and

adds, "As to myself I just keep my head above water, but very small indeed are the additions which are made to my capital in the year. Had I lived at Daventry, I might have been a rich man. Then was the time that dame Fortune knocked at my door; but since I turned the old duchess away, she has never condescended to visit me again. I do not, however, mention this by way of complaint; for I am well satisfied and highly thankful for my situation, which very far indeed exceeds all my expectations. I here enjoy that freedom of the mind, of which, in former situations, I had no conception, and which, in my estimation, is far beyond the wealth of the Indies."

Mr. Belsham continues his observations in a more cheerful strain, naturally arising from the greater excitement which a change of circumstances produced:

"Sunday morning, Dec. 26th.—This is a day to be remembered as one of the most important of my life. I have this day accepted the invitation of the congregation to undertake the whole duty of the Lord's-day. The state of the business, in a few words, was this:—Upon Mr. Kentish's resignation, I was asked by one or two, whether I would accept the afternoon service? I replied, perhaps inadvertently, that I would not refuse what had not been offered, not meaning nor wishing to be chosen to the place. In the committee, Mr. — was proposed, but warmly opposed. My name was mentioned, and by many warmly supported. It was agreed to ballot for the question, whether one minister or two was most for the benefit of the con-

gregation. It was carried for one. The next Lord's-day, Dec. 19th, an invitation was sent to me to undertake the afternoon service. I felt myself much disinclined to it, and drew up an answer in the negative, which I read to half-a-dozen friends, whom I invited to meet me. They pleaded the critical situation of the congregation, and I yielded to the plea; and this day I wrote and sent my answer in the affirmative.

“I do not know that I can condemn myself for any step which I have taken in the business. I did not seek after the situation, I did not desire it. I have been long wishing for a London afternoon congregation. There I thought I might be useful; but I have little hope of being more useful at Hackney, and the burden of preaching there in the afternoon will be very great. But, upon the whole, I am satisfied that I have acted rightly, and upon right principles, and therefore, whatever is the result, I have reason to be satisfied. I shall have only one circumstance which affords consolation. In the whole course of my life, Providence has never gratified me with the situation which was the object of my choice; but in every instance the event has turned out better than I should have chosen for myself. How satisfactory a reason for confidence in God in the performance of duty!

“I cannot but remark the different state of this congregation. In the year 1791, this society would not choose me as assistant to Dr. Priestley: in 1802, I am elected sole minister.

“I trace the course of Divine Providence with admiration and with gratitude. I desire to approve

my fidelity and zeal in the sight of God. I trust he will endue me with vigour and fortitude to perform the duties and to bear the burdens of the office with which I am now invested. The time of my continuance in it, my comfort and success, I resign wholly to his disposal."

"Friday evening, Dec. 31st.—I am now brought to the close of another year, and it has been a year of abounding goodness. Who am I, O God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? What have I done to entitle me to distinguished blessings?

"I have possessed many means of intellectual and moral improvement. Of the former I have availed myself more than the latter. I do not know that I have been deficient in the pursuit of knowledge. I am sure I have been wretchedly negligent in the improvement of character.

"I must reckon it among the blessings of the year, that my endeavours, combined with those of Mr. Lindsey and some other friends, to collect a subscription to enable Dr. Priestley to publish his *Ecclesiastical History and Notes on the Scriptures*, have succeeded so well. We have collected upwards of £1300.*

"This year, however, has had its sorrows and its burdens. It has been marked, I think, more than usual, by the death of many of my acquaintance and some intimate friends." (These being mentioned by name, the record continues.) "What a long catalogue of departed friends, many of whom, at the beginning of the year, as little thought of

* See Belsham's *Memoirs of Lindsey*, Chap. xv., p. 447, note.

dying before the close as myself, or any person in the strongest health ; some aged, some young, some in the midst of life ; some opulent, some noble, some learned, some eminently useful. God forbid that such warnings should fail of their proper effect.

“ But my principal trials have been mental. I have had to struggle with a constant tendency to scepticism. The decay of the faculties in age appears almost an insurmountable objection against the doctrine of a future life. Upon the whole, however, the evidences of Christianity preponderate. When I review them I cannot doubt. ‘ Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief.’ At least I am sure it is wise to act under the impression of the truths of revelation. But I have felt more from the want of a due discipline of the mind, from the occasional—would to God I could not say frequent or habitual !—prevalence of affections and dispositions which ought long ere this to have been in a state of complete subjection.—The many external comforts that I possess cannot afford me suitable satisfaction so long as the mind remains out of its proper bias, and the habits and affections remain undisciplined. Till the mind is duly regulated, reflection cannot be pleasing, nor prospects cheerful.”

Mr. Belsham carefully avoided any interference in the politics of the day, lest that interference should obstruct his usefulness as a minister. But the following letter evinces that he was not inattentive to the interests of the Dissenters, nor insensible of the injustice of those statutes which excluded them from their rights and privileges as

subjects. The proposal which he makes to his friend was creditable to his zeal and judgment ; but the time was not yet come that public opinion would sanction such a measure, effected by ministerial influence. It should be mentioned, that Mr. Hobhouse and Mr. Addington had been fellow-collegians, and were in habits of intimacy and friendship.

TO BENJAMIN HOBHOUSE, Esq., M. P.

“ Hackney, Nov. 17, 1803.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ May I give credit to the daily papers, and offer my cordial congratulations upon your appointment to an office in the Board of Control ? If I cannot altogether approve the measures of the present administration, I can have no doubt of the patriotism of their principles and of the integrity of their conduct, when I see them possessing the confidence and support of Mr. Hobhouse.

“ Would not the present be a favourable opportunity for your friend the Premier to acquire a considerable accession of popularity, and would it not be in perfect unison with his mild and conciliatory spirit, in a *quiet* way, to relieve the Dissenters from the disabilities of the Test Act ? I know that they do not mean to come forward themselves to ask it, lest they should be suspected of a wish to embarrass government. But is not this itself a reason why administration should spontaneously come forward to propose it ? The zeal of the Dissenters upon the present occasion has been, and is, very great. And I believe there are few Dissenting gentlemen in the

country of considerable property, who are not officers in one or other of the volunteer corps, and whose loyalty and activity in the service of their king and country does not expose them to the severe penalties of that iniquitous law. The case speaks for itself, and calls aloud for redress. Nor can there be any doubt of the acquiescence of the country, if a measure so liberal and laudable should be patronized by government. I am, &c.,

“T. BELSHAM.”

The Manchester College having declined, and ultimately being suspended, Mr. Belsham suggested a plan to combine the remaining funds of Hackney and Manchester Colleges with those of Exeter for the support of a new academical institution at Birmingham, under the superintendence of the late Rev. Timothy Kenrick, and the Rev. John Kentish, and a third tutor to be chosen by them; and it was proposed to the congregation at Birmingham to invite Mr. Kenrick to settle there as co-pastor with Mr. Kentish; but some disagreement arising upon this subject, Mr. Kenrick determined not to leave Exeter. The result was, that the friends of Manchester College determined to support that institution, and for this purpose to remove it to York, under the direction of the Rev. Charles Wellbeloved and suitable assistants, by whom it has been conducted with great ability and considerable success, affording every encouragement to impartial and free inquiry, and very essentially promoting the interests of religion and learning, though not upon a scale equal to the increasing demand of

Dissenting congregations for ministers of sound knowledge, of liberal sentiments, and of well-regulated zeal in the cause of Christian truth and morality. An objection was also made to the establishment of a Dissenting academy at Birmingham, on the ground, that both the gentlemen by whom it was to be conducted were avowed Unitarians. This objection met with warm and just reprehension from Mr. Belsham, in his correspondence with Mr. Broadbent, and the sentiments which he expresses are well deserving the attention of that class of Dissenters to which they refer :

“ Your account of the debate which took place at the meeting of the Manchester subscribers gives me some surprise. I am at a loss to explain how my scheme came to be proposed and noticed at all ; for though I had not written to you, upon Mr. Kenrick’s declining Birmingham, I had written to Mr. Lloyd, which I thought a more direct channel of information, to let him know that that proposal was completely superseded by Mr. Kenrick’s remaining at Exeter.

“ But to speak of it hypothetically, I cannot say, that any consideration which has been suggested has in the least degree altered my opinion as to the propriety and advantage of the plan that I proposed, if it had been practicable. As to the situation of the academy at Birmingham, I look upon every objection of that kind as frivolous. Every situation is good where there are proper superintendence and discipline, and every situation is bad where discipline is neglected. There are two very flourishing academies at London, and one at Bristol, and I hear

no complaint of irregularity among the students. Birmingham could not be worse than these. Hackney College was in very peculiar circumstances. The hands of the tutors were tied; they had no power; and the very construction of the building gave every advantage for irregular proceedings, which, however, I am persuaded might have been obviated by proper attention. Hackney failed for want of proper funds, and from the enormity of its establishment, the expenses of which greatly exceeded the income.

“I am, however, still more surprised at the objection made to Mr. Kenrick and to Mr. Kentish, as being decided Unitarians. Was not I such when I was applied to to take the charge of the institution at Manchester? Is not the very gentleman who is chosen as decided a Unitarian as either Mr. Kenrick or Mr. Kentish? But it seems that gentlemen who are themselves Unitarian, are afraid that young men, who are educated under professed Unitarian tutors, will become Unitarians! This is a most extraordinary ground of apprehension, and I believe peculiar to Unitarians, who have not courage, or zeal, or honesty, to act consistently with their avowed principles. Are the Calvinists afraid lest young men educated under Calvinistic tutors should become Calvinists? Are Arians afraid lest their pupils should become Arians? But Unitarians, it seems, are afraid lest their pupils should be honest and enlightened men, and think it better for the churches that they should be ignorant and prejudiced. Do they imagine that Unitarian tutors would be afraid of setting before their pupils

the orthodox doctrines and the ground on which they rest? Let them be assured, that Unitarian teachers have too much confidence in the truth of their own opinions to have the least apprehension of any ill effect arising from comparing them with any other system, however popular or plausible. But do they think, that if they study the doctrine of Christianity fairly and impartially, they will become Unitarians? I think so too. But are we, for that reason, to conceal the truth and its evidence, lest it should diffuse itself with too much rapidity? Are those who are themselves enlightened, to contribute to the obstruction of truth in its progress, and to discourage its promulgation? If this is not to be ‘ashamed of Christ and his word,’ it is hard to say what is. I confess I have not words to express my contempt and indignation at such mean and disingenuous conduct—conduct, I am sorry to add, peculiar to Unitarians; for I know no other religious party who do not glory in what they believe to be truth, and who do not actively promote its progress. *Pudet hæc opprobria nobis.* I am glad, however, that all are not of this mind. I am happy in being acquainted and connected with some who think it right to avow what they believe to be important truth, and who think it honourable to act and to suffer in an honourable cause; and I doubt not the truth will ultimately prevail, notwithstanding the opposition of its enemies, and the cowardice or treachery of its friends.

“ I doubt whether the Unitarian doctrine is advancing among people of rank and fashion, who are afraid of being thought singular; but I am sure it

advances rapidly among persons in middle and lower life. There is a very considerable congregation in London which, ten years ago, was highly Calvinistical, but which is now become decidedly Unitarian. And I have no doubt, that if the ministers who hold these principles were boldly to avow and to teach them, though they would give offence to some of their present hearers, they would gain ten new hearers for one that they lost. But while men who think justly upon theological subjects are afraid of avowing their principles, and use evasive and ambiguous language, they never can do any good. They are playing the game into the hands of the Methodists and Calvinists, who are not ashamed of their opinions, and they must gradually be deserted. I wish all who think with me felt this truth as strongly as I do, and I am confident that in ten years' time the Unitarian churches, instead of being deserted, would be crowded with hearers.

“Mr. Kenrick is not gone to Birmingham. The congregation at Exeter were unanimous and earnest in desiring him to remain with them; that at Birmingham was divided, and a very strong and respectable opposition was formed against him. Even Mr. Kentish, whose happiness seemed to be bound up in the expectation of Mr. Kenrick being his colleague, and who, I verily believe, would not have accepted the invitation to Birmingham had it not been for that expectation, when he came to the spot and saw the state of opinions in the congregation, himself advised that he should withdraw his acceptance.”

At the commencement of the year, after some observations and reflections similar to those which have been recorded in previous extracts from his diary, Mr. Belsham concludes with the following devout aspiration :

“ My heart is full of fear and dejection. Save me from an unbelieving and an undisciplined mind. Let me not only be diligent in the pursuit of truth, honest in the profession of it, zealous in teaching it, but let me be still more zealous in the practice of virtue, and more earnest in promoting the genuine spirit of the gospel in myself and others. In this pursuit let me be successful ; all else is of little account. Let me be truly pious, virtuous, and useful, and conduct me to final happiness by whatever way thou pleasest. ‘ It is the Lord ; let him do what seemeth him good.’ Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Benevolence sit at the helm of universal government, and all must ultimately terminate well.”

“ Thursday evening, June 2.—I have this day been employed in the melancholy office of reading the funeral service over my worthy friend, Mr. Thomas Rickards, with whom I have lived upon terms of great intimacy for upwards of twenty-five years ; he having been a respectable member of my congregation at Worcester.”

“ Thursday, June 23.—I this day received intelligence of the death of Mr. Scholefield of Birmingham. He was an intimate friend, whom I have known and highly valued for thirty years. Thus my oldest and most approved friends and acquaintance are gradually withdrawn from the stage. In

a little time my part will be finished and the curtain will fall. O may I so act, that I may then obtain the applause of the great Master of the drama, who is the only infallible Judge of real worth, and in whose favour alone is life !”

After adding many other names to the list of departed friends, he continues, “ All these are solemn mementos of the great change through which I must shortly pass, and which, to say the truth, I bear in mind every day—I might almost say, every hour.”

The interest which Mr. Belsham took in the welfare of his pupils, and his concern to see them filling their stations in society with honour and usefulness, has been already noticed. The following letter beautifully displays an anxiety truly affectionate to witness the progressive improvement, virtue, and happiness of one who was entering on the busy theatre of active life.

TO ROBERT MILNES, Esq.

“ Permit me, my dear Sir, to avail myself of the privilege of my late connexion with you to remind you, that it is your destiny to move in no obscure or subordinate sphere. You occupy a station of importance. The eyes of many are fixed upon you. Much is expected from your talents and your virtues. Much from the dignified example of unsullied honour, integrity, and patriotism, which your father has bequeathed, as the most valuable legacy, to his numerous family. Your conduct may involve the happiness of myriads. It certainly will involve the comfort of those who are

entitled to the largest share of your affection, and to whose spirits, wounded to the quick by the present mournful event, you, of all persons under Divine Providence, are capable of applying the softest balm, and whose eyes and hearts are naturally directed to you for this purpose on this trying occasion. I am sure you will not disappoint their fond, their just, their eager expectations, nor, I trust, those of the public. *Macte virtute.* You know my profession, and I hope are not insensible of my sincere regard for you. Permit me, then, to express it by the warmest wish of my heart for you, that you may unite the liberal spirit and cheerful views of rational Christianity with the purest morals of its austere sect. To be a rational and a practical Christian is to be truly wise and truly happy; and so it will be found, when every other source of consolation shall vanish as a dream. Yours, &c.,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.”

Mr. Belsham maintained a regular and intimate correspondence with Dr. Priestley from the time of his leaving this country, and took the most lively interest in his pursuits and the success of them. In one of his letters to his expatriated friend, written February 2, 1804, as it afterwards appeared, but a few days before his death, he says, “Nothing is more interesting to me than to know every thing relating to you: what time you rise, when you take your meals and exercise, and how you divide the day, that, though I am not with you in person, I may amuse myself in joining you in imagi-

nation and spirit, both in your studies and your recreations.”

The mournful intelligence of Dr. Priestley's death being received in England, Mr. Belsham immediately addressed the following letter to his son, Joseph Priestley, Esq., then residing in America, now at Cradley, near Stourbridge, Worcestershire :

“ *Hackney, May 29, 1804.*

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I sincerely sympathize with you in the great loss which you, and we all, and indeed the whole philosophical and Christian world, have sustained, in the removal of your most excellent father. The event has made great impression here, and many who were unwilling to say much in his praise while living, are ready to unite with his numerous and avowed friends in their expression of regret, now he is gone. The interesting account which you wrote of his last hours, a judicious extract from which Mr. Vaughan published in the Philadelphia Gazette, from which it has been taken by every paper in this kingdom, and I suppose in Europe, has produced an extraordinary effect upon the public mind in favour of Dr. Priestley's character and principles, and has occasioned an increased demand for his works. I have taken the liberty of annexing the whole account to the discourse which I delivered at Hackney upon this painful occasion, of a copy of which I request your acceptance. It accompanies this letter.

“ I am glad to find you are in possession of your

father's memoirs, and that you mean to publish them, and to bring them down to the conclusion of his life. I was very urgent with him to continue them, and am sorry to find that he has brought them no lower than 1795. I think Mr. Cooper much better qualified than I to give an account of his works, and therefore I beg leave to decline it. The Monthly Magazine announces that I intend to write his life, but this never entered my thoughts. What I should be glad to do, and feel a strong inclination for, if I could find time for it, is to write a review of Dr. Priestley's controversies in theology and metaphysics; but this would have no connexion with the history of his life.

“I am, &c.,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.”

Mr. Belsham thus notices this event in his diary:

“April 8.—I have this day been performing a most painful task. I have been preaching a funeral sermon for Dr. Priestley. He died on Monday, February 6th, having, for a fortnight or three weeks before that time, gradually grown weaker and weaker. He expired at last without a sigh or a groan. The intelligence came not from his family, but from Mr. Bakewell, of New York. Of the certainty of the event there can be no doubt, though some think that I have been hasty in preaching a funeral sermon so early. My reason was, that I was anxious to throw the oppressive load off my mind, and I did not wish to attract a

crowd by advertising a funeral sermon, in which I knew that I could not give satisfaction, either to myself or others.

“Mr. Lindsey bore the intelligence with great fortitude. Indeed, he considers himself as so near his end, that the Doctor dying first is probably a satisfaction to him rather than otherwise, as he will hope to meet him the sooner. His pulse, however, was affected, which shews that his nerves were shocked; but though it alarmed Mrs. Lindsey, who is herself much affected with the late event, it produced no ill consequences.

“When I resigned my situation at Daventry, I secretly wished, but little expected, to obtain the friendship of these two excellent men, Mr. Lindsey and Dr. Priestley. It pleased God to grant my request. Both these eminent servants of God, and confessors of truth, took me to their hands and their hearts, and I have been ever since upon the most intimate terms with them. Dr. Priestley, indeed, has been long in a manner dead to us, for correspondence is not to be compared with intimate conversation.

“I have now for fifteen years enjoyed the friendship of these venerable men; and Dr. Priestley is at length, unexpectedly to his friend Mr. Lindsey, ten years older than himself, dismissed from his post of service. Mr. Lindsey will soon follow. God grant that I may now so imitate their virtues, and follow their bright example, that I may, in a future state of being, be united with them in the bands of everlasting friendship!”

On the anniversary of his birthday Mr. Belsham continues his reflections :

“ Thursday, April 26.—I have now finished the fifty-fourth year of my age. What shall I render to God for all his mercies ! I am a wonder to myself.

“ ‘ Strange ! that a harp of thousand strings
Should keep in tune so long.’

WATTS.

I cannot boast that my time has been improved, nor dare I presume to be confident that I am in a state of better preparation for death than I was at the close of the last year. If former miscarriages have been avoided, I am conscious that I owe much more to the restraints of Divine Providence than to virtuous resolution ; and God grant that such restraints may still be continued. I call to mind much that is amiss ; and some things I reflect upon with great uneasiness ; and the apprehension of what may some time happen, fills me with terror.—Death has made many encroachments upon the circle of friendship the last year. Dr. Priestley is gone. What a character was his ! O that I might resemble him more, and so improve life as to encourage the hope of being again united to his society in another and a better world.

“ I have but a short time before me, and much work to do. I seem to myself to begin life at the time that others are going out of it. I hardly dare hope to live to see my proposed Commentary on Paul’s Epistles finished, at the rate I go on. Perhaps Divine Providence will point out some method by which I may be able to advance with greater speed. I hesitate between prudence and what appears to me the means of usefulness. Per-

haps I am unwilling to make the sacrifices I ought. Wilt thou, O God, direct my steps, and teach me how I may best employ my remaining powers and time in thy service? I have not yet suffered any thing by having cast myself upon Divine Providence in the way of duty. Let me not distrust thy care. On the other hand, let me not tempt thy Providence. Give me understanding to discern, and a heart to perform, the duties of my character and station. Prepare me for the events of the year on which I have entered, and reconcile my mind to every state and every change, whether riches or poverty, whether evil report or good report, whether approbation or neglect, whether health or sickness, whether life or death. Give me a will humbly, dutifully, cheerfully, and wholly, resigned to thine."

This year was marked by the inroads of death upon the circle of Mr. Belsham's most intimate and valued friends. The following extract from his diary sufficiently explains the occasion of those painful regrets which were excited by the circumstance to which he alludes:

"Sunday evening, Sept. 2.—How mysterious and unsearchable are the ways of Divine Providence! I have this day been preaching a funeral sermon for him whom I fully expected to preach mine. Mr. Timothy Kenrick, my brother-in-law, who married my sister Elizabeth, died last Wednesday sennight, Aug 22. The manner of his death was most extraordinary. The following is his son's account of this melancholy event, dated Wrexham, August 22:

"It is with difficulty I can compose myself to

inform you of the distressing event which took place a few hours since. My dear father is no more. He was walking in the fields near the town, and in crossing a stile he fell with violence on his head. He was taken up by a man who was near, and placed upon a chair, and, as soon as medical assistance could be procured, the proper means were used, but no blood would flow. I was two or three miles from the spot; I came in about half an hour, but he had breathed his last. My father had just returned with my aunt; my sister, and myself from Chester, and was as well as I ever saw him. The funeral is fixed for Sunday.'

"I am informed that Mr. Kentish went over from Birmingham to officiate at the funeral, and that he preached a sermon upon the occasion. I was at Gloucester, when I heard the melancholy tidings, on Saturday the 25th: I wrote immediately to my sister, but did not see it necessary to go down to Exeter, it being inconvenient to undertake so long a journey. I had been at Bewdley on Thursday, and there settled with Mr. Kenrick's uncle, who expected him on Saturday, to have an interview with him at Gloucester on the Monday following. Little did we suspect that our friend, of whom we were conversing, was no longer an inhabitant of this world.

"From my sister I have heard twice. She bears the stroke better than her friends could have expected, and is wonderfully supported under her great affliction. The Meeting (at Exeter) was to be shut up to-day, and the funeral sermon is to be preached the next Lord's-day. My sister earnestly

pressed me to go down and preach it, but I durst not undertake the office, and refused :* I could not trust my feelings. The sermon I made upon the occasion had but a remote relation to Mr. Kenrick personally : ‘ We have this treasure in earthen vessels ;’ I found it, however, difficult to go through with it. Wherever there was an obvious allusion to him I could hardly utter the sentence.

“ The event appears to me one of the darkest dispensations of Divine Providence that I have ever known. His loss is great to his family, to his neighbourhood, to his friends, and to his congregation ; but in a public view it seems almost irreparable. He appears to me to have entertained very just views both of the doctrines of Christianity, and of the importance of avowing them. I never yet met with any person whose ideas, in this respect, so nearly coincided with my own. And he had a firmness and courage in avowing, and defending, and propagating what he believed to be important truth, which very few possess. And he was active in a variety of ways in instructing the youth of his congregation, in supporting the Unitarian Society, and in conducting an academy for divinity students, which began to wear a promising aspect. The Unitarian cause, which I believe to be the cause of truth, of virtue, and of genuine Christianity, could

* The importunity with which this request was urged by his sister, by his friend the Rev. J. Bretland, and by many of the congregation, as appears from letters now before the writer, must have greatly increased those painful feelings by which Mr. Belsham would have been agitated, had he made the attempt, the apprehension of which must be allowed to be a just reason for declining the service.

not, in present circumstances, have lost an abler or a more successful advocate. I had, in my will, left him all my papers, with liberty to make what use of them he pleased, and to publish what he apprehended might merit publication. I have no person left who thinks so entirely with me, and in whom I can place the same confidence. But it matters not. Great is the truth and it will prevail; and if some eminent teachers of truth are removed from the stage, and others are superseded, and their offers of service are not accepted, God will raise up other and more efficacious instruments to perform his work, and the meanest instruments become all-powerful in his hands. The cause of truth and virtue, and human improvement and happiness, are the cause of God, and he may safely be entrusted to conduct it in the way that to him appears best. In the mean time I desire that the removal of such eminently wise, and active, and useful men, as Dr. Priestley and Mr. Kenrick, may stimulate me to redouble my exertions while life and health and ability are continued; and whether the success with which I may be favoured be more or less, I desire to be content, and humbly to acquiesce when it comes to my turn, as it very shortly must, to be superseded or removed. I can rejoice in the consciousness that whatever my success may be, my intention was right, and I humbly look to the mercy of God to forgive my imperfections, and to accept the sincere, though ineffectual, purpose of my spirit. And I trust that I can truly rejoice in the superior talents and success of others, who are still labouring in the vineyard. O that the Lord of

the harvest would send many such labourers into his harvest !”

The following extract is from a letter addressed to Mr. Belsham by Mr. Robins, on hearing of this melancholy event :

“The distressing account of Mr. Kenrick’s sudden and mysterious death reached us in the public papers a very few days after the event, so related as to leave no doubt of the melancholy fact. And never was I much more affected by any of the innumerable instances of mortality which I have witnessed among my acquaintance and friends. A more interesting, or important, or amiable character I have very seldom if ever known ; in the very zenith of life, of honour, of usefulness, and of comfort ; and connected in the closest ties of friendship and affection with so many of my most respected and beloved friends. Poor Mrs. Kenrick, what must she have felt when the shocking tidings first reached her ! But I rejoice to hear that God has supported her, and restored her to some good degree of submission and peace. I think you did right in declining to preach at Exeter, on the sad occasion ; it would have been too much for feelings so tender and strong as I have often known yours to be in less trying circumstances.”

“December 31st, Monday evening.—Life steals away from point to point, though seeming to stand still. Another year is now brought to a close, and it has been crowned with goodness. The mercies of the year have been very great—uninterrupted health, general good spirits and cheerfulness of mind, much freedom from many failings that were

formerly a source of much pain and regret, means of improvement, capacity for exertion, strength equal to the day of severe trial, preservation from temptation, much social satisfaction, intercourse with friends very pleasant and delightful, new friends in the room of older ones removed, peace, and uniform respect and kindness from the congregation, unlimited liberty of speech and action ; as a testimony of respect, a very handsome present of plate, much satisfaction at times in public service ; at the same time I have my fears how far I am useful, either in communicating instruction or exciting virtue and piety.

“ My venerable friend Mr. Lindsey, to the surprise of every one, has lingered on to the end of the year, but he is now in such a state that in all probability he will not continue many days. Instances of mortality are very alarming. The cases of Dr. Priestley, Mr. Kenrick, Mr. Rich, and Mrs. Corrie, affected me very much : two of them in the midst of life and affluence, two of them men of eminent usefulness. One indeed who had reached the usual limits of human life, but who we fondly flattered ourselves, from the vigour of his constitution, would be spared longer ; the other, Mr. Kenrick, cut off suddenly, in the midst of life, health, activity, and usefulness : an awful stroke that would bode ill to the cause of rational Christianity among the Protestant Dissenters, if that were not the cause of God. But when he takes away instruments that to human judgment are most efficacious, he will raise up others who shall be more successful.

“ In the temper of my mind through the year I

see much that is amiss, much that needs reform, much that I fear is almost beyond reformation. If in any case temptations have been moderated, and prevention has been granted, I acknowledge it with gratitude: ‘Not I, but the grace of God that was with me.’ I fear that I am not sufficiently regular in devotion; and I am sometimes sadly distressed by doubts with regard to a future life, which I hardly know how to solve. Upon the whole, excepting the removal of some valuable friends, the year has proved more comfortable and happy than I had reason to calculate upon at the beginning. Fears have been disappointed and hopes exceeded. Let me then learn to place confidence in God and to trust in his mercy. ‘Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.’”

There was no period of Mr. Belsham’s life more critical than that on which he was now entering, nor any situation more important than that which was offered to his acceptance. Dr. Disney having signified his intention to resign his office as minister of Essex-Street Chapel, it became the earnest wish of the Trustees resident in London to elect Mr. Belsham. The following extract from a letter, dated February 27th, requesting Mr. Belsham to take the proposal into serious consideration, and inviting him to a conference upon the subject, will shew the motives by which they were influenced, and the object which they had in view in the accomplishment of their purpose:

“We the Trustees of the Chapel in Essex Street, in the Strand, now resident in or near the metropolis, truly lamenting that the ill state of health of

the Rev. Dr. Disney should have obliged him to communicate his intention to resign, at the ensuing Lady-day, the office of minister of the congregation assembling there, think we cannot in any manner fulfil the trust reposed in us more satisfactorily to ourselves, or more beneficially to the Congregation, than by unanimously inviting you to become his successor. By you, we are assured that the Sacred Scriptures will be faithfully expounded, and the Divine Truths of the Gospel inculcated in their original purity, while from your public ministrations your hearers will derive important instruction and consolation, and in the tenor of your life have a striking illustration of the efficacy of the doctrines you teach.

“We are aware that many explanations may be necessary, and that there may be some difficulties to be surmounted before we can hope to attain the object of our present application; but we mean to convey to you in the strongest manner our anxious desire, in case you should incline to give us a favourable answer, to accommodate and render every thing agreeable to you to the utmost of our power.

“The period at which the office of Minister will become actually vacant is *so near*, that we hope we shall be excused for transmitting to you this invitation signed only by such of the Trustees as are resident in or near London, but we have communicated our proceedings to the other Trustees, who reside in the country, and have no doubt whatever, that in a few days we shall have the pleasure of forwarding to you the expression of their wishes in unison with our own.”

To this application Mr. Belsham replied in the following letter addressed to George Barclay, Esq., M.P., and the other Trustees :

“ GENTLEMEN,

“No person can lament more sincerely than I do, the occasion of the present vacancy in the chapel in Essex Street, and no one can feel with greater sincerity the honour which you have conferred upon me, by your unanimous invitation of me to succeed so truly respectable a person as Dr. Disney in the office of minister of a congregation which has a right to be regarded as the first and the most distinguished of the Unitarian churches.

“Placed by the goodness of Providence in a situation far beyond my expectations, and equal to my highest wishes, I feel little inducement from personal considerations to desire a removal. But the post of extended usefulness is the post of duty, and I think that I discern in a connexion with Essex-Street Chapel, a prospect of rendering greater service to the interests of truth and virtue than the more private situation of Hackney can afford. And could I flatter myself that my qualifications for this purpose were in any degree proportionate to what your kind partiality has ascribed to me, or to my own ardent zeal in this honourable cause, or that I possessed in a due degree the spirit of my revered friend, the venerable founder of the congregation, I should have little hesitation in fixing my choice. Still, however, while capacity for exertion continues, I do not wish to shrink from a post of service if there be a reasonable prospect of

usefulness and comfort. I do, therefore, with pleasure accede to the proposal of a personal conference with one or more of the Trustees, at any time or place that they may think fit to appoint, and am, Gentlemen, with much gratitude, and with great respect, your obedient servant,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.”

The application of the resident Trustees was immediately followed by the concurrence of their brethren in the country, as appears from the following letter to which their signatures were attached:

SAMUEL SHORE, Esq., to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“*Meersbrook, March 2, 1805.*”

“DEAR SIR,

“By a letter from Mr. Lindsey, received this morning, I am informed that the Trustees of Essex Street Chapel, resident in town, have come to a resolution to invite you to succeed Dr. Disney as minister of the said Chapel, and that this is agreeable to the congregation assembling there. In consequence of which I cannot but cordially unite, as one of the Trustees, in such an invitation, both from the great regard I entertain for you, and as being convinced that no one would more effectually promote the great cause of truth and genuine Christianity than yourself, wherever you may be situated. I remain, dear Sir, with the truest respect, most sincerely yours,

“SAMUEL SHORE.”

Signed also by J. P. Heywood, and M. A. Whyte, Esqrs., the other Trustees.

It will be seen from Mr. Belsham's reply, that an opinion had been entertained by some, and not unjustly, that a conscientious clergyman, who had seceded from the Establishment from a conviction that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is one, and the only proper object of religious worship, should have been appointed to this situation, the chapel having been founded by one who acted upon this conviction, and for the express purpose of affording those who had been members of the Established Church, and others, an opportunity of uniting in the sole worship of the One living and true God, but that no suitable person of this description could be found, who was ready to undertake the office, or who would have been acceptable to the congregation.

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to S. SHORE, Esq.

" Hackney, April 22, 1805.

" DEAR SIR,

" Accept my sincere thanks, as a Trustee for the Chapel in Essex Street, for the honour you have done me in concurring with the other Trustees in the invitation to accept the office of minister of that chapel ; and as a friend, for the kind expression of your favourable sentiments and good wishes, of which I can only say that I should be happy to feel myself more deserving. I can easily conceive that you would feel some surprise, both at the applica-

cation to me and at my acceptance of the invitation. As to the former, I believe that every possible inquiry was made after some seceding clergyman who would be likely to suit the Essex-Street congregation, but to no purpose ; and with regard to my own determination, I have greatly deceived myself if that were not influenced primarily, I think I might say solely, by the prospect of a more extensive sphere of usefulness, and by an earnest desire to gratify the feelings and to soothe the last hours of our venerable friend. A man who, like Mr. Lindsey, has made such costly sacrifices to truth and conscience, has surely some right to expect that others should make some sacrifices for him, if not inconsistent with duties of superior obligation.* With respect to interested motives, no person will suspect me of them who knows the situation of the two congregations ; and with regard to connexions, I cannot be happier than I have been at Hackney. I may have erred in my judgment, but I think I cannot be mistaken in my motives. I may hereafter, possibly, see reason for regret, but I trust never for self-condemnation.—I am, Sir, with great respect, your affectionate friend and obliged servant,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.”

* In a letter to his friend Mr. Broadbent, Mr. Belsham says, “This was not a precipitate determination. Ever since last September, when Dr. Disney came in for his large fortune, Mr. Lindsey, to my great surprise, expressed to Mrs. Lindsey a wish to live and see me minister of Essex-Street Chapel. I quite started at the idea. It had never crossed my mind before ; but afterwards, being frequently contemplated, it became familiar ; and upon Dr. Disney’s resignation, when I knew that Mr. and Mrs. Lindsey would use every effort to introduce me, I made up my mind to accept the invitation.”

The knowledge of these proceedings greatly excited the apprehension of Mr. Belsham's friends, and of the congregation at Hackney, and occasioned the following address to him, signed by the leading members of the society :

“ Hackney, March 6, 1805.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ We are very much concerned to understand that an attempt has just now been made materially to weaken, if not entirely to dissolve, your religious connexion with the society of Unitarian Christians meeting at Hackney. This unfriendly interference has greatly surprised us. We had supposed, indeed, that the Trustees of Essex-Street Chapel had been too firmly attached to the pure principles of Christianity to offer a proposal, the acceptance of which must prove an irreparable injury to the progress of those principles in a situation where you have so eminently, and with so much success, laboured to promote them.

“ Whatsoever secondary and partial views may have influenced such an application, allow us, dear Sir, to bring to your remembrance the years which you have passed in our connexion, the gradual increase of the congregation, the regular attendance on your public services, the zeal and satisfaction with which your very instructive lectures have been uniformly received. With such encouraging prospects of progressive utility, we trust that your well-known attachment to those great objects on which the welfare of the rising generation so peculiarly depends, will not suffer you to withdraw yourself

from a situation which, in your experience, has been so favourable to their advancement.

“ We might further urge the recollection of that affectionate friendship which has always been maintained between yourself and the whole congregation ; but we are persuaded that you will regulate your conduct, on a question so important, by considerations of higher moment. While, therefore, we ardently wish that your determination, whatever it shall be, may promote the important purpose of your life and labours, we cannot but express the serious doubts we entertain whether any preponderance of good will result from your acceptance of a proposed connexion which will be productive of the deepest regret to, dear Sir, your sincere and affectionate friends, &c.”

The motives by which Mr. Belsham was influenced, and which determined him to accept the invitation to Essex Street, must have been strong and urgent to overcome an appeal so persuasive and affectionate. These have been already stated, and are referred to in his reply to the Trustees, of which the following is a copy :

“ *Hackney, March 8, 1805.*

“ GENTLEMEN,

“ After mature deliberation, I now write to apprise you that I am come to the resolution of accepting the invitation with which you have honoured me to undertake the office of minister of the congregation assembling in the chapel in Essex Street, in succession to Dr. Disney. To be in-

strumental in promoting, in a more extensive sphere, the knowledge and the worship of the One true God, in the way in which we have been instructed by our great Master, Jesus Christ, and in diffusing the salutary and sublime truths of primitive and uncorrupted Christianity, are objects worthy of the most indefatigable exertions, and of the greatest sacrifices of personal consideration. And I trust that a connexion formed under a sense of duty, with the Divine blessing, will eventually be productive of the happiest consequences. In every scheme, the adoption of which may appear conducive to the interest of rational and practical Christianity, I shall cheerfully rely upon your cordial support, and upon the countenance of the numerous friends of truth and virtue in the respectable congregation with which I am about to be connected. Accept, Gentlemen, my warmest thanks for the candour and friendship which I have experienced from you in our mutual communications upon this important subject, of which I shall ever retain a grateful recollection; and am, Gentlemen, yours, &c.,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.”

In reply to Mr. Belsham's letter, in which he signified to the congregation at Hackney his intention to resign his situation as their minister, the following resolution was communicated to him at the request of the society:

“REV. AND DEAR SIR,

“Agreeable to your wish, I read your letter of

the 10th instant to the congregation assembling at the Gravel-pit Meeting immediately after the morning service of that day. Its contents were listened to with the greatest attention, and the sorrow for the dissolution of a connexion so highly and justly valued, was visible in every countenance. A motion was made and carried unanimously, that I should write you a letter, 'expressing the deep regret and concern we feel for your resignation as our minister, and that we entertain the most lively and grateful sense of your valuable and useful labours among us; that we thank you for your kind expressions of regard and affection for us, sentiments which we feel for you in the highest degree, and earnestly hope that though the connexion between us as minister and people must be at an end, our mutual regard and affection for each other will never be dissolved but by death.'

"Allow me, dear Sir, to say that I believe no minister was ever more highly esteemed by his congregation, and to express an earnest desire and hope, that those eminent talents and virtues, of which we have been the witnesses, will produce the happiest effects on the minds and hearts of your hearers wherever assembled; and that at the great day of recompence you may have many souls as the crown of your rejoicing. I am, dear Sir, with the greatest esteem, your obedient, humble servant,

"F. RONALD.

"*Highbury Terrace, March 17, 1805.*"

It appears to have been the wish of Mr. Belsham and of his friends at Hackney, that he should con-

tinue to be the afternoon preacher at the Gravel-pit Meeting, and it was thought this might be consistent with his officiating at Essex Street. A doubt, however, arose, whether this could be allowed, consistently with the terms of the deed and the conditions of the trust for Essex-Street Chapel. Mr. and Mrs. Lindsey were particularly anxious that Mr. Belsham should confine his services to Essex Street, and the following letter is a proof how earnestly Mrs. Lindsey was interested on this point:

“*April* 15, 1805.

“DEAR SIR,

“I do not know when I have suffered more than on Saturdaymorning by the communication I made to you, for which I have blamed myself, as nothing official has past, nor even any personal communication from the Serjeant (Heywood) to Mr. — whom we saw on Saturday night. I hope you have not acted upon such a mere expression of the *then* mind of *one* Trustee; it would be very wrong and precipitate, as you are connected with a body of persons.

“I have been an unlucky agent all through this business, by too great eagerness and injudicious zeal; and I fear have done more harm than good, and am suffering in proportion: for my diseased sensations admit of no calm reasoning, no principles becoming a Christian, and the philosophy which belongs to it, ‘that there is but one will in the universe,’ and that will must take place, and is always for the best.

“ If I have not contributed to your unhappiness, or abridged your usefulness, my first object being to promote both for the good of others, and actively to accomplish my very excellent husband’s wishes, what happens to my individual self is as nothing.

“ Mr. Lindsey is persuaded that something favourable to your views will take place, when the parties can meet in a fortnight’s time and confer ; the thing which has unavoidably been wanting all along in this business ; and nothing has been made plain to you for want of this at an early period. Single and detached representations are not the proper way to judge and act well, especially on important permanent points.

“ The great satisfaction to us both, and to many, many others, is, that we have you here ; whether single or divided would not grieve us if your happiness, ease, and usefulness are but promoted. And previous to what has happened, I believed that your course was as clear and unembarrassed as a human being’s could be, connected with men of long-known liberality, generous minds, and friendly hearts. Of their legal obligation, to such an extent, I was not aware, as nothing before had called it into action : your peculiar previous connexion has now made the difficulty. But I must have done ; my weak mind is too much impressed. My pen was only taken up at your venerable friend’s desire to express, in the fullest manner, his delight and entire approbation of your first discourse, which arrived late on Saturday, and which so charmed me in the reading, that eyes and voice, so often faltering, were quite perfect whilst I read your sermon,

and which was conned again and again by Mr. Lindsey yesterday. My zeal for *you* and our cause can never suffer but a momentary suspension : it is interwoven into my very nature, and can only cease with the powers of mind or body, or jointly. Our best, cordial wishes and affectionate regards are yours.

“T. and H. LINDSEY.”

The Rev. T. BELSHAM to Mrs. LINDSEY.

“*Hackney, April 15, 1805.*”

“MY DEAR MADAM,

“If it were not for a few who may be a little too zealous, when there are so many who are a great deal too lukewarm, how could any thing good ever be accomplished ? I will not, however, admit that you are even in the former number. Considering the connexion in which you and Mr. Lindsey stand with respect to the chapel, that the whole concern is the fruit of your and Mr. Lindsey’s exertions only, and that the Trustees have no power but what you and Mr. Lindsey have conferred, I cannot allow that in any thing you have done, you have exceeded the limits of the strictest propriety ; and I am fully of opinion that what would be highly unbecoming in others, differently circumstanced, is perfectly correct in you. At any rate, if my removal to Essex Street is right, the merit is wholly yours. I fear that the prospect of superior usefulness would hardly have induced me to quit my present station, had I not been further animated by the desire of adding something to the comfort of my venerable friend’s declining years, and of fulfilling his and your ardent wishes.

And had the sacrifice of my own ease and gratification been greater than it is, I should have felt a conviction that you and my aged friend were fully entitled to expect it from me, and I should have rejoiced to make it for your sakes.

“With regard to preaching at Hackney in the afternoon, I acknowledge it was my wish, because it would have been an accommodation to myself while I resided here. This, however, I can truly say was the least of my reasons, and I would not insist upon it for a moment. I was most anxious for the congregation, who would, I believe, have been unanimous for Mr. Aspland, if they could have been secure of my services in the afternoon, besides the gratification they would have had in not being entirely separated from their old pastor. I hoped that this arrangement would have allowed me an opportunity for an evening lecture during the winter at Essex Street, to be conducted in a systematic manner. This was my plan, and it appeared to me to embrace many advantages ; but it certainly was not in my contemplation when I accepted the invitation of the Trustees to Essex Street, and if it does not meet with their cordial concurrence, I readily acquiesce in the relinquishment of it, for I am sure that no good can be done without harmony and unanimity.

“Having had no official intercourse with the Trustees upon the subject, and the congregation here having resolved, contrary to my wishes, to take no step till they had received my answer, after the conversation which had passed between us on Saturday, and the letter I had received from Mr.

Joyce,* I made no hesitation of informing our Treasurer that, after mature deliberation, I found that the nature of my engagement at Essex Street absolutely precluded my acceptance of their invitation. My letter was read to the congregation yesterday. I am therefore now wholly and solely minister of Essex-Street Chapel, where I shall be glad to do all the good I can, in the best way I am able, while life and health are preserved and opportunity is continued. I am happy to hear that you and Mr. Lindsey approve my introductory discourse. I feel very bold as to any attack which may be made upon it. I am, dear Madam, your and Mr. Lindsey's, &c.,

“T. BELSHAM.”

In the memoranda of his diary, Mr. Belsham particularly notices these events. A few extracts will shew the state of his mind, and confirm the account already given of the motives by which he was actuated. After some reflections similar to what he had been accustomed to make at the commencement of the year, and the expression of his firm reliance upon the good providence of God, he continues :

“I desire to keep my heart pure and my faith unshaken. I desire to think more of God, to converse more with him, to meditate upon his providence and promises, and to be found in the way of duty. May it be my great ambition to be useful,

* Mr. Belsham had applied to this gentleman to conduct the afternoon service at Essex-Street Chapel, which he declined.

and O that my labours for the improvement and instruction of myself and others in wisdom and virtue may not be in vain !

“ Lord’s-day evening, March 3.—How wonderful are the ways of Providence ! Sixteen years ago I resigned my connexion at Daventry, and looked forward to nothing but retirement and obscurity. Three years afterwards I was disappointed in my expectation of being chosen assistant to Dr. Priestley, and foreseeing the inevitable fall of the College, I resigned myself to despondency and gloom. What unexpected events have since occurred ! ‘ What am I, O God, and what my father’s house, that thou hast brought me hitherto ? ’ In April 1794, I was chosen pastor of the Gravel-pit congregation ; in January 1803, I became sole minister of this congregation, upon the removal of Mr. Kentish to Birmingham. Nor did I expect that any event would ever occur to induce me to leave a situation so free, and comfortable, and happy, and to appearance useful. But Dr. Disney has resigned from ill health, and on Thursday last I received a unanimous invitation from the Trustees to succeed him. I have returned a favourable answer, and am to have a meeting with them to-morrow evening. God knows that the pre-eminence to which he has been pleased to raise me, was never sought nor expected by me. I trust that I can appeal to the Most High for the purity of my motives in the step I am now about to take. And unexpectedly invited by his providence to a situation so new and arduous, I trust I shall experience the same support and assistance with which I have hitherto

been favoured. ‘ I live in pleasure while I live to thee.’ ”

“ Lord’s-day evening, March 10.—This has been to me an eventful week. On Monday, according to appointment, I met the Trustees of Essex-Street Chapel. They very candidly laid open to me the state of the Trust. I declined coming to any resolution till I consulted my friends at Hackney. I previously received a note, signed by a number of friends, expressing their regret at the intelligence they had received. I promised to come to no resolution till I had talked the business over with Mr. Lindsey. I came to the final resolution of acceptance. I wrote the letter to the Trustees the same evening, and carried it to Mr. Lindsey on Saturday morning. The same evening I wrote the letter of resignation to the congregation at Hackney, which cost me many tears ; and this morning I delivered it to Mr. Ronald, who read it to the congregation after the service.

“ Much regret was expressed and I doubt not is felt. It seemed to give great pleasure to some friends whom I have seen, to hear that I was not averse to continue my connexion as afternoon preacher. Thus a gleam of light seems to break through the darkness. If this is accomplished to the satisfaction of all parties, I shall think myself very happy.

“ O God, how wonderful are thy mercies ! Thou knowest the heart of thy servant. To thee I appeal for the purity of my motives—that my first object is extended usefulness ; and my next, to soothe the last hours of the best of men ; of one who, having

himself made through life the greatest sacrifices to the cause of truth and virtue, is entitled to any sacrifice from the friends of the same cause, which is in their power to make consistently with their duty. Thou, O God, hast promised a reward to the faithful and obedient, but hast directed their views to a future remuneration ; but to me thou hast granted abundant recompence even in the present life—inward satisfaction, esteem and affection of friends, comfortable competence, distinguished situation. I sought nothing, and God has given me all. O that I may feel a due sense of his goodness, and may be influenced by it to devote myself to the cause of Truth and pure Christianity with greater zeal and energy than ever, remembering especially that the time is short !”

“ Sunday evening, March 31.—I opened my ministry in Essex Street this morning. The congregation was large. I felt somewhat fluttered. Mr. Joyce read prayers : I preached from Matt. xvi. 13, ‘ Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am ?’ I received many compliments from the hearers, and was desired to print. Mr. and Mrs. Lindsey seemed very happy.”

“ April 26, Friday night.—I have this day finished my fifty-fifth year, and I stand a wonder to myself, a monument of infinite mercy. The days of my years have exceeded my own expectation ; they have exceeded those of my venerable predecessors, of Jennings, Doddridge, and Ashworth : they have extended beyond those who entered upon life with better constitutions and fairer prospects. Not only has existence been continued, but health also

hath been preserved almost without interruption, and from painful accidents I have been wholly exempt. I have not been able to attain that independence of circumstances for which I have always panted, but God has been very good to me, and has not suffered me to want; and by not indulging my love of ease, he has probably made my life more useful and more happy. Averse to all change, ever desirous of continuing in the situation which I occupied, the revolutions of my life have been greatly beyond the common lot of my profession; and, blessed be God! all of them have been favourable; most of them have been such as my ambition might lead me to aspire to. God knows that I have not sought, but have been sought. I do not recollect that I ever made interest for any situation; at least I am sure, that where I expected and desired, I have been disappointed, and Divine Providence has always done better for me than I should have chosen for myself. In my connexions I have been happy beyond what I can express. What a proud pre-eminence to have enjoyed the friendship, and even the intimacy of Price, of Priestley, and of Lindsey! I might mention others, but these were the excellent of the earth. How happy have I been in my pastoral relations! It is not in imagination to conceive a connexion more honourable, more happy, may I say more useful, than that which I enjoyed at Hackney. What freedom of speech, what encouragement, what liberty, what kind affection! Why then do I leave a situation so enviable? O God, thou knowest the heart of thy servant. I hope I do not impose upon myself. The world

may—nay, must mistake my views. They will suppose I am influenced by motives of interest and ambition. I hope this is not the case. If I can judge my own heart, I never acted upon purer principles. At Hackney I was easy and happy. I was ready to say to my soul, ‘Take thine ease,’ and perhaps was inclined to relax my exertions. But a new sphere of activity and usefulness has offered, and I trust that a sense of duty has led me to accept it; and it has roused me to a state of mind that I have not felt for years. I was also influenced by the anxious wishes of Mr. and Mrs. Lindsey. Nor can I think it wrong to make a sacrifice of any thing but duty to their happiness. And here I feel it as an additional stimulus to the performance of a duty to which I might otherwise have been extremely reluctant. What the issue will be, God only knows, and I can wait the event with tranquillity and satisfaction, let it be what it may. It is in my heart to serve God, and to promote Christian truth and virtuous practice. Whether I succeed or not, I trust it will be judged that I have well done that I had it in my heart.

“I now enter my fifty-sixth year. Whether I shall live to see another birth-day I know not. I desire to live to finish the task that I have set myself. But if this should be denied, I acquiesce. What is necessary to accomplish the purposes of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness will be brought to pass in its proper season. As to myself, I would desire nothing but a heart wholly devoted to the service, and a spirit resigned to the will of God.”

“Sunday evening, May 5.—This morning I

preached a farewell sermon to the congregation at Hackney. The place was very full. The subject, 2 Tim. iii. 14, ‘Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and of which thou hast been assured, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.’ I was at times considerably affected, but upon the whole I passed through the service better than I expected. I have thus voluntarily terminated a connexion of eleven years’ standing; a connexion as harmonious and as happy as could possibly exist between minister and people. How far that into which I have now entered will prove either happy or useful, God only knows. I trust that I have acted upon right motives; whether I have acted with right judgment, is another question. But as this new sphere of activity offered itself without any desire or seeking on my part, I thought it my duty to embrace it. The issue of this measure I would leave with God. If he accepts me as an instrument of diffusing the knowledge of evangelical truth, I shall esteem it the greatest happiness of my life—if he here puts a period to my public labours for the benefit of others, I would bow to his disposal and say, ‘Thy will be done.’ God will never be at a loss for instruments to carry on his own glorious cause. I know in whom I have believed; and if active service should be suspended, I would take comfort from the thought from which I have often derived consolation on former occasions :

‘They also serve, who only stand and wait.’”

“Tuesday, Dec. 31.—It is curious to compare

the expectations formed at the beginning of a year with the events which actually took place in it, and it shews how little we know of what a day may bring forth. Little did I guess at the commencement of this year what my situation would be at the close of it, nor should I have believed it had it been foretold. Nor can I help feeling regret at the changes which have taken place, though I see no reason to repent of what I have done, or of the motives by which I was governed. On Sunday, May 5, I preached my farewell sermon at Hackney. This I printed and gave to the congregation, but it was not published. From this time I commenced morning preacher at Essex Street. For the months of August and September the chapel was shut up to be repaired. The first Sunday in October it was opened again with the new edition of Mr. Lindsey's Liturgy, at the express desire of the Duke of Grafton and others, and with the consent of the trustees. I then commenced preaching morning and afternoon. The first Sunday in November I administered the Lord's Supper for the first time. Most persons will, of course, believe, that I have been influenced by ambition and self-interest. I readily excuse them, because my conduct must have that appearance. With respect to self-interest, I gain little or nothing; as to ambition, I desired nothing better than to live among my Hackney friends and to be connected with them. I visit some, but not many in the congregation; and upon the whole I feel myself as comfortable as I expected. Mr. Lindsey is wonderfully revived, and from the time of opening the chapel has attended constantly

in a morning. Besides two sermons and the Liturgy, I have printed a small volume of Letters to the Rev. J. P. Smith,* who attacked some positions in my sermon for Dr. Priestley.

“ The inroads of death this year in some instances have been unexpected and alarming. My venerable friend, Mr. Lindsey, is surprisingly recovered and restored, so as to attend chapel, which he had not done for four years : but he is feeble both in body and mind, and we cannot hope for his company long. Others of my friends have been taken away in the bloom of life and in circumstances the most affecting and distressing.† To these must be added the Rev., learned, and respectable Edward Evanson.

“ The general state of my mind, I hope, has not been worse than usual. I flatter myself that it is somewhat improved ; but I am conscious of imper-

* In this work Mr. Belsham vindicates his statement of the Calvinistic system, defends the character of Dr. Priestley, and shews that he had greatly the advantage of Dr. Horsley in the controversy respecting the faith of the early Christians, (the Ebionites,) repels the charge of inadvertency and gross misrepresentation advanced against himself, and exposes the mistakes and inconclusive deductions of his opponent. Though a short work, it evinces the learning and ability of the writer, and how much better he was acquainted with the subject than the gentleman who presumed to question the accuracy of his statements or the justness of his reasonings.

† The cases to which Mr. Belsham refers were those of Mr. William Hunt, of the Brodes, and of Mr. John Hunt, of Birmingham, the former of whom was killed by a fall from his horse, the latter died of a fever in London. To the parents of these amiable and lamented young men, Mr. Belsham immediately wrote in the spirit of Christian friendship, affectionately endeavouring to console them under these mysterious and affecting dispensations of Divine Providence.

fections to keep me humble ; I had almost said, that produce dejection and despondency. I am troubled with many doubts and fears, but upon the whole I have a prevailing belief of a future life, and a cheerful and unhesitating confidence in the goodness of God. I cannot sufficiently acknowledge the kindness of Divine Providence.”

The following letter, referring to circumstances already mentioned, will shew the high respect in which Mr. Belsham was held by Mr. Robins, and how truly the sincerest and warmest friendship may exist between persons whose sentiments in some respects widely differed. Few have there been who imbibed more of the benevolent and catholic disposition of a Christian than this excellent and amiable man. The humble and patient resignation with which he bore that afflicting dispensation of Divine Providence, by which he was incapacitated for public service, though not for very considerable usefulness, affords a useful and impressive lesson to all, and especially to those who are exercised with similar trials of their faith and patience. The sphere in which he was placed by the loss of his voice, was very different from that in which he was qualified to move ; but his character and virtues gave him an influence in society, which in some degree compensated for the loss of his services as a minister, and the consistency and propriety of his conduct preserved to him the respect and affection of his brethren, of his friends, and of all to whom he was known.

The Rev. T. ROBINS to the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“MY VERY DEAR SIR,

“I am really ashamed that I have been obliged to delay so long my acknowledgment of a present so peculiarly acceptable as your late letter, and the two Sermons, and Reply to Mr. Smith’s Letters, which accompanied it; but I have been for many months past, and especially of late, so sunk in body and mind, as to be capable of doing or enjoying next to nothing. I was particularly happy to learn from Mr. R. Wainewright, that he so cordially approved of your appointment to the pastorship in Essex Street, and that the venerable and excellent founder of that noble interest was delighted by it. I now most cordially thank you for your late, and for innumerable previous proofs of your friendly and affectionate regards, and particularly for the kind mention you make of me in a note in your farewell sermon at Hackney.* There is no man living of

* The passage to which Mr. Robins refers is the following:—“In the year 1781, I was appointed tutor of the academy at Daventry in succession to the Rev. T. Robins, who was, in consequence of the loss of his voice, under the necessity of resigning that honourable and important situation, which, for several years after the death of Dr. Ashworth, he had filled with great reputation, acceptance, and success. The uncommon talents and virtues of this most excellent person (who, I trust, will pardon me for introducing his name upon this occasion,) can only be exceeded by that extraordinary degree of humility and self-diffidence, which, unfortunately for the world, have confined within comparatively a very limited sphere the beneficial influence of those various acquisitions, of that singular facility of communicating instruction, and of that eminent rational piety, which, in a more public and conspicuous situation, might have been productive of the most signal benefit to mankind.”

whose esteem and friendship I am more ambitious, and a testimony of both, so circumstanced, would have delighted me, did not the consciousness, that I must owe it to the partiality of friendship rather than to merit, almost annihilate the gratification, though not lessen the obligation. Whatever I once was, whatever by more fortunate exertions I might now have been, I am really sunk into such insignificance, both as to character and circumstances, as to render such an encomium from such a quarter humbling, if not distressing. But I have followed what I thought the leadings of Providence, and whether I should have been more respectable, prosperous, useful, or happy in any other situation, cannot be ascertained. My lot is now cast, and I am sure by perfect wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, and I wait the near and final issue of it with some, though but a trembling hope. I most sincerely rejoice that you have been led by the same wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, into a situation, and formed to a character so much more respectable, useful, and happy; and very far was I, when I wrote to Mr. Palmer, from intending to impute to you any improper motives in your late very important change of ministerial connexions. Without ambition to rise and shine in his proper sphere, no man ever became really illustrious, and I cordially rejoice in the ability God has given you, and in the opportunity he has afforded you to rise to the very summit, in that line of literature and ministerial pursuits, to which your exertions have been so long and so zealously directed. Long may you enjoy your well-earned, and, as I think, very ho-

nourable elevation, and all possible success in every attempt to promote the knowledge and belief of the whole truth as it is in Jesus, and especially its practical influence. My ideas of the former may not exactly coincide with yours, though in nothing of any great importance, I believe, very different; as to the latter, our views and wishes, I presume, entirely agree. To form men to the spirit and character of Christ is the grand object of all systems of Christian doctrine, and he is the best minister of the Gospel, who is most perfectly influenced by them, and who applies them to the formation of others to similar excellence with most fervour and success. This, I doubt not, is your chief aim and endeavour, and I trust that your zeal for the speculative peculiarities of your present system will not be suffered to engross so large a proportion of your attention, as to abate your ardour in pressing that temper and practice, without which the most perfect knowledge were useless, and even pernicious to its possessor.

“ I have read your Sermons, especially the latter, and your remarks on Mr. Smith’s Letters, with increasing admiration of the very superior talents and excellencies of the writer. Of your controversy with Mr. Smith, I am not indeed a competent judge, as I have not yet read his Letters, which I hope ere long to do, when I have no doubt of my being still more thoroughly convinced, that he has no remaining ground of triumph. Severity of sentiment or language I could wish had in some instances been avoided, or at least softened; especially in what, I cannot but think, he might with some propriety call your caricature of Calvinism, in the

advertisement prefixed to your Letters. Some of the articles in that system I detest as cordially as you can do ; but as a whole, I think fair experiment for centuries proves, that it has not had the effects, nor, therefore, can have the shocking tendency you ascribe to it ; and so heavy a charge, prefixed to an attempt to correct Calvinistic errors, can have no effect upon their advocates but to exasperate and thereby steel them against conviction, and to suppress all charity and forbearance towards their opponents. It is happy for you that you are not at the mercy of the Reformer of Geneva, or of some of his followers. I regret, with you, that the more liberal of the London ministers have so many hindrances in their important work, and still more that their exertions and success are so small. But I rejoice in the assured belief, that the cause of Christian truth and righteousness will be supported and finally triumph. I am, dear Sir, your obliged friend and obedient servant,

“ THOMAS ROBINS.

“ *Daventry, July 22, 1805.*”

It was probably in allusion to this letter that, writing to his friend at Warrington, Mr. Belsham says, “ Your account of Mr. Robins gives me much concern, especially as it was confirmed by a letter from himself, which came by the same post. I am very apprehensive that his constitution is breaking up. The different state of mind of Mr. Robins and of Mr. Evanson, nearly at the same time of life, and in circumstances very similar, shews the different effect of their respective systems

of religion ; Mr. Robins, brought up among the Calvinists, for whose principles he still retains a secret partiality, is full of doubts and fears with respect to his future state ; though if there be a man in the world who has a right to look to a future life with cheerful expectation, Mr. Robins is the man. On the other hand, Mr. Evanson, who has adopted sentiments the most liberal and enlarged, is full of faith, hope, and comfort, even under the pressure of a disorder which threatens immediate dissolution ; and though Mr. Evanson is an excellent man, it is no disparagement to him to say, that he is not Mr. Robins' superior in moral worth."

Mr. Belsham now entered on the duties of his office, as sole minister of Essex-Street Chapel, with that zeal and energy which might be expected from one convinced of the importance of truth, and of the open avowal and communication of it. In writing to his friend, he observes, "The chapel was opened, as was originally intended, on the first Sunday in October. I have just begun a course of lectures, after the morning service, upon the Evidences of the Christian Religion. This is quite new, and last Sunday was well attended. I hope it will be of use, especially to the young people. Nothing, I am convinced, is learned to good purpose that is not learned systematically ; and religion requires it as much as mathematics and philosophy."

The commencement of the year 1806 is thus noticed by Mr. Belsham in his diary :

"Wednesday, Jan. 1.—The goodness of God has brought me to the beginning of another year. Though I suffer little or no pain, and enjoy what is

generally considered as an uncommon share of health, nevertheless I feel symptoms of mortality to so great a degree, that it seems almost a miracle that I am preserved from day to day, and I believe that no one does or can live under a more habitual, though, I thank God, not a distressing or alarming apprehension of approaching dissolution."

The following extracts from Mr. Belsham's correspondence with his friend Mr. Broadbent, exhibit his political sentiments ; and his observations on the communications made by the late Duke of Grafton shew how much he was accustomed to refer every event to the appointment and agency of God.

" Feb. 17.—What extraordinary changes have taken place since I last wrote to you ! It seems like a dream. I hardly know how to believe that Mr. Pitt is dead, and that Mr. Fox is now the Prime Minister of the country. What blessings may we not hope for under his able administration ! If human talent and exertion can save the country, the country is now safe. If peace can be obtained with honour and security, as I firmly believe that under Mr. Fox's auspices it may, we shall have peace. If war is continued, it will be because war is inevitable, and we must make up our minds to encounter its privations, its burdens, and its dangers. The new ministry are certainly brought in without the King's goodwill, but he acquiesces, with a good grace, in what he cannot prevent."

Mr. Belsham continues his observations on the manner in which the administration was formed, and on the rumours and conjectures then prevalent as to its continuance, and on the ability and qualifi-

cations of the several members, and concludes with saying, “ There would be more danger of a dissolution of the administration, if the Catholic question were to be brought forward ; but I have some reason to think that the Catholics will be advised to postpone their claims, perhaps till the next reign, or at least until the administration are more firmly settled. And till the kingdom is put in a state of safety, I believe that neither the Reform of Parliament, the repeal of the Test Laws, nor the abolition of the Slave Trade, will be brought into discussion. We are now struggling for existence ; all other questions, therefore, must be postponed till better times.”

Sept. 24.—After describing the manner in which he was received and employed at Wakefield Lodge, he continues, “ Within doors the Duke amuses us with reading the History of his own Political Life, which he is drawing up for the information of his son, and which he desires to have published after his decease. It is drawn up with great simplicity and candour, in a very neat style, and is truly interesting ; for the Duke took a very important part in the measures of administration at the origin of the American contest. And it is very curious to see upon what a slender thread the fate of empires is suspended, and upon what a nice point the most important affairs sometimes turn. If Lord Chatham had, as he ought to have done, directed the administration which he himself had formed, or even taken the pains to make known his own opinion upon the great points which were then agitated ; or if Lord Rochford, whom the Duke of Grafton brought into

the cabinet, had voted with the Duke after his introduction, the quarrel with America would have been made up. There would have been no American revolution, and consequently no French revolution; and how different would the state of the world, in that case, have been! So we vainly talk and reason; whereas, in fact, every thing happens, in time and place, as the wisdom of the great Ruler of the world has ordained that it should, and the passions and prejudices, the pride and ambition of mankind, are only instruments which he makes use of to accomplish the purposes of his providence. His counsel shall stand, and what he wills is right.”

Though Mr. Belsham officiated as minister at Essex-Street Chapel, he continued to reside at Hackney, Essex House being occupied by Mr. Lindsey. He was steadily engaged in drawing up his lectures on the Evidences of Christianity, which, he says, “considering the persons before whom they are to be delivered, take up almost as much of my time as the composition of a sermon.” Another occupation was the transcribing his Exposition of the Epistles of St. Paul, with the notes, for the press, which happily he lived to publish, though not till it had undergone a complete revision, and some parts of it been remodelled and recomposed.

In the review of the year, Mr. Belsham records the privileges and mercies he had enjoyed, in the grateful language in which he was accustomed to express his sense of the blessings of Divine Providence.

“Thursday, Jan. 1.—The goodness of God to

me in the past year has been very great, and the more to be admired and acknowledged because it has been constant and uninterrupted. I have enjoyed health and ease, and all the blessings of life in great abundance. My relative comforts have been numerous, and the means of intellectual and moral improvement great. I have not, for one day or hour, been rendered incapable of private or public business, by pain or sickness. My public services have in general been very pleasant, and my acceptance beyond all expectation. It is often the subject of grateful admiration. I hardly know how to believe what I am continually witnessing. God knows that I never sought or laboured after it as a primary object.

“ The business of the year has, upon the whole, been regularly performed. I cannot charge myself with great mispense of time, though I am far from regarding myself as quite innocent upon this head. I have delivered a course of sermons on the Evidences of the Christian Revelation, which are now in the press. I have also begun a course upon Inspiration. But I am sorry to add, that for the last six months nothing has been done with the Exposition. I keep it, however, constantly in view, and regard it as my magnum opus. In the month of April, I preached a sermon for the Unitarian Book Society, which I printed ; and in October I preached a funeral sermon for Mr. Fox, which I also printed, and which has met with greater acceptance than I expected.

“ The political events of this year have been most wonderful. The death of Mr. Pitt ; change

of Ministry ; Mr. Fox and his friends in place ; the negociation with France, which all expected would terminate in peace, and which broke off in disgust ; the death of Mr. Fox ; Buonaparte's war with Prussia, his total subjugation of that country ; his march into Poland, where he is now offering independence to the Poles ; all this has the appearance of a dream, and is what nobody could have suspected at the beginning of the year.

“ The political horizon is uncommonly dark. Peace seems at a great distance, and the whole world bows to the yoke of Buonaparte. All commercial intercourse with the continent is restrained. This, it is thought, must be ruinous to many people here. But God knows what is best. He rules the storm, and will direct its fury. ‘ Father, thy will be done.’ ”

“ April 28.—On Sunday last, the 26th inst., I finished my fifty-seventh, and entered on my fifty-eighth year. When I think of my advanced period of life, I am ready to start back with astonishment ; not that I attempt to conceal my age from myself or others. It is constantly present to my thoughts, and the consideration of the few remaining years is hardly ever absent from my mind. ‘ A wise and experienced man,’ saith Dr. Johnson, ‘ will not be hasty in forming resolutions.’ I have learned from experience to subscribe to the justice of this remark. But I know what I have to avoid, and what I have to perform ; and I desire to bear in mind how short a time remains for the duties of life, and for the discipline of the heart. Also, that what is highly blameable in youth, is inexpressibly disgraceful in

advanced years. O God ! thou knowest my situation, thou readest my heart, and thou alone canst work out deliverance.”

In the early part of this year the public mind was greatly agitated by the state of affairs, and by the efforts made at the general election, which occurred at this time, to return members favourable to the views of those who formed the administration. Mr. Belsham observes to his friend Mr. Broadbent, (July 20,) in reference to this circumstance, “ Very fortunately, I had no vote for any borough, city, or county, so that I kept quiet at home, and amused myself with the bustle of the passing scene. Indeed, since the death of Mr. Fox, I have taken comparatively little interest in public affairs. I was, indeed, gradually becoming more and more attached to the late administration, though I always thought they had committed an irreparable error in not making peace. But they were honest men, and meant well to the liberties of their country ; and they were pursuing a very economical system of finance. The turning out this party and putting in the miserable creatures who succeed them, upon the foolish and ridiculous ground of not extending liberty to the Catholics and Dissenters, has cast a very dark cloud upon our political prospects ; and the success of Buonaparte in Poland, and peace upon the Continent, seem to have sealed the ruin of the country. We may now expect threats of invasion to be renewed, and we shall be fortunate if they are not carried into effect.

“ The zeal of the Dissenters, and particularly of

the Dissenting ministers in Yorkshire* in favour of the late administration, and the disdain with which they generally treated the cry of ‘No Popery,’ has given the leaders of that party a more favourable opinion of Dissenters, and induced some of them to desire an interview with a few of the Dissenting ministers in London. Accordingly, we were invited to dine at Mr. Serjeant’s Heywood’s about a fortnight ago. The party consisted of Lord Holland, Lord Lauderdale, Lord Howick, Lord Stanley, Mr. Whitbread, and Mr. W. Smith, on the one hand; and per contra, Dr. Rees, Mr. Jervis, Mr. Aspland, Dr. Lindsay, and myself. I expected it to have been an insipid party, but it proved otherwise. Dr. Lindsay, (late Mr. Lindsay, of Monkwell Street,) who, you know, is a bold and intelligent man, told Lord Howick, that when he was in power he did not go far enough. ‘You will do no good, my Lord,’ said he, ‘until you do something for the people. If you were to come in again to-morrow, you would be turned out the next day, if you brought forward any measure that was offensive to the Court. If you would bring forward your own plan of Parliamentary Reform, you might do some good, but till then you can do nothing.’ Lord Howick, who is a very proud, reserved man, gazed with great attention and amazement at our friend Lindsay, not having been used to be addressed with so much freedom and so little ceremony; but he did not appear to be at all offended; and with the greatest politeness and good humour replied, ‘He

* In behalf of Lord Milton.

was now as much a friend to Parliamentary Reform as ever, but he was fully persuaded, that if he should bring forward a measure of this kind into the house, at present, he should be left in a very small and a very unpopular minority ;' and Lord Holland added, ' That the people stood in great need of being enlightened, for he was fully persuaded that if we had, at this time, a House of Commons which spoke the sense of the great mass of the people, we should be in a much worse situation than we are at present.' I thought all this very good sense, but my friend Lindsay was not convinced. The conversation, however, was kept up with great spirit and good humour till half-past ten o'clock, when we parted. The clerical guests liked the party very much, and I hope that the political guests were not displeased. We all agreed that Lord Holland was a most amiable and agreeable man, and that he had much of the appearance and style of his late admired and regretted relation."

In the beginning of this year, Mr. Belsham published a series of Discourses " On the Evidence and Practical Importance of the Christian Religion," which he had previously addressed to the young persons of the congregation at Essex Street. In these Sermons his intimate and extensive acquaintance with the subject is fully manifested, and he states with great ability and force, though in a concise and summary manner, the weight of those arguments by which the divine mission of Christ and his apostles is supported, and shews the weakness of the objections which have been urged by unbelievers, particularly those of Hume and Gibbon.

There is scarcely any other work in which the subject is so clearly stated, and the arguments presented in so strong and impressive a light, as in these few but well written and convincing Discourses.

The Rev. B. Carpenter, of Stourbridge, had published a work in two volumes, entitled, “Lectures on the Works of Creation and the Doctrines of Revelation;” in which, Mr. Belsham observes, “he has made a severe attack upon the Unitarian doctrine of the proper humanity of Christ, and other doctrines connected with it.” Mr. Belsham was induced to reply to the animadversions of his friend, and published his remarks, first in the *Monthly Repository*, and afterwards in a separate pamphlet. In these strictures, Mr. Belsham controverts the Arian doctrine, which he supposes to be the system advocated by Mr. Carpenter, and shews, not only that it was unknown to the Evangelists and Apostles, but that it was of too late an origin to be the doctrine of the New Testament, or the faith of early Christians. The manner in which he comments upon the reasoning of his friend is certainly severe and sarcastic, and the point of view in which he places his arguments, is humbling and ludicrous; and Mr. Carpenter complains of “the supercilious and contemptuous tone which Mr. Belsham often assumes,” though he adds, “I will not forget that I wrote something calculated to hurt his feelings, and that I might justly expect some retaliation.” Few readers, who can judge of the controversy with impartiality, will hesitate in giving the palm to Mr. Belsham, though they may think that some of his expressions

should have been more guarded, and the bitterness of his sarcasms should have been suppressed. The explanation and apology with which Mr. Belsham concludes his observations, prove that he had no intention of unnecessarily wounding the feelings of his friend, and that it was to the system, and not to the advocate, that he applied that severity of language which was the ground of offence to himself and others. If the Arian doctrine, or the tenets which Mr. Carpenter maintains, be not proved to be the doctrine of Scripture, it must be granted it has not been for want of zeal or ability in their defence ; and Mr. Belsham has justly said, “ Though some learned advocates of Arianism have been pleased to insinuate, that my friend has not made the most of his argument, for my own part I know of no better arguments for the Arian hypothesis than those which he has advanced, and upon which the great stress of the controversy was always laid by his learned predecessors in the last century.”

. The close of the following extract from a letter to Mr. Broadbent is connected with this controversy, and the whole passage strikingly exhibits the well-regulated and happy state of Mr. Belsham’s mind.

. “ Nov. 26.—At Daventry I found our friend Mr. Robins in tolerable health and spirits, but weaker than he was last year ; at least he thought himself so, for he durst not encounter the walk to Brough Hill (an eminence near Daventry): I think my greatest enjoyment was a solitary walk thither, in which I indulged the luxury of calling to mind the scenes through which I had passed since I took my first walk upon that well-known spot. I could not

but review with admiration and gratitude the way in which I had been conducted thus far in the pilgrimage of life, and the many vicissitudes which I have experienced, all of them unsought and unexpected to myself, but all of them leading from good to better, and better thence again, and better still, till now that I am almost at the end of my course, I find myself in the best situation of all, and see abundant reason to be satisfied and thankful for every step of my progress, so far as the care of Divine Providence is concerned, though the discipline has sometimes been severe; and as few, I believe, have suffered more from the gloomy system in which I was educated, so few can enjoy more completely that rational and cheerful system of faith which I have now the happiness to entertain. In times like these, one cannot but feel some anxiety with respect to futurity; but believing, as I do, that all things are under the direction of Infinite Wisdom and Benevolence, and that all the vicissitudes of life, and the revolutions of empires, are intended to accomplish some benevolent design; and seeing, as I think I do, much good arising from the great evils which have taken place, I feel, in a very considerable degree, resigned to the will of Divine Providence, both with respect to public and to private concerns. And perceiving, as I think, our national affairs rapidly tending to an awful and alarming crisis; and feeling, since the death of Mr. Fox, little or no interest in any political party, and knowing my own individual exertions can be of little use, I am disposed to 'stand still and see the wonderful works of God,' and to wait patiently at the post of duty

for the issue of that course of events which it is not in my power to controul. Of one thing I feel confident, that whatever happens it shall eventually be well with the righteous, and upon this principle I desire to act.

“ I am glad that you are not displeased with my reply to brother Carpenter. I have paid a compliment to my friend at the close of the correspondence, and have made an apology for any harsh expressions which may have escaped me which the subject did not warrant. The argument appears so clear to me, that if experience did not prove the contrary, I should think that every one who read it would be convinced by it ; whereas, in all probability, most, if not all, who look into the controversy, will lay the book aside with the same sentiments which they had before. I should myself have done so, if I had continued to live at Worcester, instead of accepting the invitation to Daventry. It was nothing but constant, repeated, stubborn attention to the subject which removed my own prejudices ; why then should I wonder at or find fault with others for feeling and acting as I myself should have done in similar circumstances ? I cannot help shuddering sometimes to think how near I was to rejecting the invitation of Mr. Coward’s trustees, and burying myself at Worcester. I am thankful to Providence, that had destined for me an infinitely preferable lot.”

The following is the notice which Mr. Belsham makes of the anniversary of his birth-day :

“ Tuesday, April 26th. — This day fifty-eight years I was an helpless infant ; I am now entering

upon my fifty-ninth year, an old man upon the verge of sixty. I can truly say, that ‘I die daily.’ The thought of death is always uppermost in my mind; but not so as to distress me, or to make me at all unhappy. It rather makes me indifferent to public amusements, and any thing of that kind; also to the cultivation of society of rank and fashion, of which I was once eager. And it excites me to diligence in the work I have to do, as the time is short. ‘The day is far spent, and the night is fast approaching when no man can work.’ I do not feel the vigour for working which I did formerly, and I have my Exposition to finish. The preparation of the Improved Version of the New Testament has, for the last two years, prevented my writing a single line; but I must very soon resume this work, and, with Divine assistance, nothing shall divert me from it till I have finished it. While I live I desire to be not wholly useless; at least I am unwilling to be idle.”

This year was distinguished by the death of Mr. Lindsey, of whom, after the very full and interesting Memoir which Mr. Belsham has published, it would be presumptuous in the present writer to attempt any encomium. Such an event, it may be supposed, would make a deep impression upon Mr. Belsham’s mind, and, it will be seen, was frequently in his thoughts. The following remarks occur in his diary:

“The deaths of the year have been numerous, and some of them, in their peculiar circumstances, awful and distressing. Among the most important are the following:

“ Nov. 3.—The Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, ætat. 86, confined to his bed just one week. The death of this venerable man has long been expected, and, on his own account and Mrs. Lindsey’s, was much to be desired. I attended the funeral and performed the service on the 11th; and preached the funeral sermon on the following Sunday, the 13th. It has since been printed, with a short Memoir. This service, which was long foreseen with great anxiety, was executed with much pain, fearing that I might not do justice to the subject and the occasion. The discourse, however, has met with the approbation of the candid and judicious, and with their testimony I am satisfied, combined with the consciousness that I spared no pains in the preparation. If I do the best I can, I ought not to be dissatisfied if I cannot do better. I consider myself now as having achieved my most painful task. I am much less anxious about any thing that further lies before me. O that I may be found worthy of meeting and associating in a better world with those excellent characters whose friendship I have sought, and upon the model of which I have endeavoured to form my conduct. All else is of little moment.

“ Dec. 1.—William Hunt, Esq., of the Brades, near Birmingham, died of apoplexy. He expired at four this morning. A man universally esteemed and beloved. One of my earliest, best, and most valued friends. This closes the account of those of my friends and acquaintance whose decease is recorded in my diary, and it is, upon the whole, one of the most awful registers of mortality which I have had occasion to review.”

In writing to his friend, Mr. Broadbent, Feb. 15, 1809, who had expressed his approbation of the funeral sermon for Mr. Lindsey, Mr. Belsham says, "I am very happy my sermon afforded you so much satisfaction, and I should be entirely destitute of the feelings of an author, if I were not gratified by your remarks upon it, which I must believe are very judicious, and which at least coincide with the flattering testimony of some partial friends; particularly Mr. W. Smith, whose remarks upon it are so much in unison with your own, that I am persuaded, when they come to be published two or three centuries hence, the critics of that age will not fail to maintain that you copied from one another. You do me too great honour in putting me upon a level with my venerable friends (Lindsey and Priestley). In zeal for truth, and honest, diligent researches after it, and in a willingness to forego all things for it, I would not yield to either of them. But in other respects I know my proper distance; and though I despise an affectation of humility, I would not 'think of myself more highly than I ought to think.' In one instance I quite agree with you, 'that Dr. Priestley did as much to promote the cause of truth as Mr. Lindsey.' This is what some of Mr. Lindsey's admirers will hardly bear to hear, and if you have seen the Athenæum, you will observe that Mr. Lindsey is there represented as the Luther of modern times. This was not his character, nor did he pretend to it."

In the same letter, speaking of a common friend who in early life had been acquainted with Dr. Taylor, Mr. Belsham says, "What you relate con-

cerning the Improved Version* gives me much pleasure. I am very happy to hear that the Mr. Gaskells are pleased with the notes. Such is the great advantage of having been intimate with such a person as Dr. Taylor, who thought freely in his day, and was more obnoxious to the soi-disant orthodox than the Unitarians are now. He thought much himself, and he taught others to think; and though he did not advance so far as others have since done, yet the most enlightened of modern divines would probably not have known so much, nor have understood the Scriptures so well, if Dr. Taylor had not gone before them to clear the road."

The following extracts from Mr. Belsham's diary are peculiarly impressive and important:

"I am now entering upon another year (1809), and who can say what will be the events,—what pleasing occurrences,—what afflictive dispensations,—what unexpected inroads of mortality,—what new duties,—what new trials,—what will be my own situation a twelvemonth hence!

"Great God, thou hast been my help from my youth, and now when I am old forsake me not, but be my supporter even to grey hairs. As I advance in life I feel the decay of bodily strength and of mental vigour, but what remains I would devote wholly to thee. And if any thing which I can write or teach may be of use to promote the cause of

* Mr. Broadbent had said, "I have parted with all my copies but one of the large edition, and am asked for more; the Gaskells are highly delighted with it, and seem rapidly following your steps. The young men have the spirit of eager inquiry, and have strong, well-informed, and independent minds."

evangelical truth and of practical piety, I shall esteem myself highly honoured. It is pleasing to see what appears to me to be the cause of Christian truth, is daily gaining ground; and surely it must eventually prevail. I do not altogether approve of some of the means which are used to promote it, nor can I cordially concur in them; but while I am exerting myself in the way that I think best, and which at least is best adapted to my views and powers, I would rejoice if others succeed in a different way; nor would I presume to limit the wisdom and power of Divine Providence in the choice of instruments and means of propagating truth. ‘Send I pray thee by whom thou wilt send,’ and give success to thine own cause, in thy own time, by thy own instruments, and in thy own way.

“Prepare me for the events of the year. Preserve me, I beseech thee, from distressing anxiety, from the infirmities and failings of advancing years; keep my mind calm and quiet; let me not distrust thy good providence, which has hitherto provided for me beyond all my expectations and wishes, and which surely will not at last forsake me. But whatever happens in the present life, O let me not finally fall short of the hope of the gospel.

“April 26.—I have this day entered upon my sixtieth year. It seems to me hardly credible that I can have travelled so far in the journey of life; that I have arrived at an age that I formerly regarded as almost the extreme limits of the human career.

—— ‘To gentle life’s descent
We shut our eyes, and think it is a plane.’

One fact is remarkable; I find myself happier in the present stage of existence than in that which preceded it. I formerly possessed a more acute sense of pleasure, and many things in which I once took delight would be a fatigue and a burden. But I am more quiet; I am more free from painful contests, from painful feelings, and from painful expectations; and upon the whole, though there is a mixture of painful sensation with pleasurable feeling, yet these feelings are more amalgamated with each other, and I am constrained and thankful to acknowledge, that the excess is pleasurable, and the preponderance is on the side of happiness. Thanks be to the abundant, unmerited, unchangeable goodness of God! One great cause of present satisfaction is, that I see men and things in what appears to me to be their true light. The first thirty years of life was a kind of dream. Nothing appeared in its due proportion; every object was magnified, and in a considerable degree distorted. I had notions much too exalted of rank, of opulence, of learning, of character. I might be said to be an idolater of the creature; and my religious views were irrational and false in the extreme, and a source of unspeakable pain and misery, especially during my course of studies at the academy. They completely destroyed the comfort of my life, and made the naturally delightful season of youth an insupportable burden. I will not, however, deny, that this discipline may have been, upon the whole, an advantage. After I took the charge of the academy at Daventry, and still more since I came to London,

I have seen many things. I have conversed with men of learning, with men of opulence, with men of rank, with men of virtue. I have been shewn behind the scene, and have seen something of men as they are. I have been introduced, as it were, into a new world. The scales have fallen from my eyes, and I have learned to form a more correct, and for that reason a more satisfactory judgment of human characters and human life. I have learned neither to think too highly, nor to expect too much from men; and in this corrected state of the feelings I experience a considerable degree of satisfaction."

The following letter was written in consequence of a motion made in the House of Lords, on Friday, June 2, by Lord Sidmouth, for an account of the licenses granted yearly under the Toleration Act since the year 1780, grounded upon the belief that the said Act had been much abused. See the *Monthly Repository*, Vol. IV. p. 352.

TO BENJAMIN HOBHOUSE, Esq.,
Whitton Park, Middlesex.

"MY DEAR SIR,

"Will you excuse the liberty I take of stating to you, that the late motion of your noble friend in the House of Lords has excited the greatest alarm in the minds of the Protestant Dissenting ministers, who are to be convened in a general body next Thursday, to appoint a committee to watch its progress.

"From the very high and amiable character I have heard from you of Lord Sidmouth, and from the mild, conciliatory spirit of his too short-lived administration, I cannot bring myself to believe

that it is his wish to trench upon the true spirit of the Toleration Act. I should rather flatter myself that he would wish to extend it. But I am persuaded that his only object is that the Toleration may not be abused, and that the immunities granted by the Toleration Act may not be extended to those who qualify themselves under the Act for no other purpose than to exempt themselves from the burdensome offices which it is their duty, in common with their fellow-citizens, to undertake; and in guarding against this abuse, I believe that there is not an honourable man among the Dissenters who would not most cordially concur.

“The true medium, if you will permit me to state my own ideas upon the subject, appears to be this. Whoever thinks himself qualified to teach and to preach, whether he be learned or unlearned, let him by all means hold forth to those who are willing to hear him, without being exposed to the penalties of persecuting laws, or being dependent upon the discretion of bishops to grant or to withhold a license. This is the grand principle of Toleration, and in defence of it the Dissenters of all denominations, Trinitarians, Arians, Unitarians, Calvinists, Arminians, Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists, and the vast and growing body of Methodists, would all unite as one man; and to infringe it would, in my humble estimation, be the excess of imprudence and impolicy, and would tend to bring back the times and the troubles of Laud, if not of Bonner.

“But to what class and description of preachers civil immunities, of any kind or to any extent, should be granted, is a very different consideration,

depending wholly upon the discretion of the Legislature. In these liberal and enlightened times, I am persuaded that the customary immunities would not be withheld from those ministers who were connected with congregations. It would be generous to extend it to those young men who are *bonâ fide* educating for the ministry in Dissenting academies, and who are now liable to the militia, if not to other burdensome laws.

“ It might, perhaps, be worthy of the consideration of your noble friend, whether it would be desirable, under existing circumstances, to stir this delicate question at all. By a very prudent clause lately introduced into the Militia Acts, no Dissenting ministers are exempted from their operation but those who are actually connected with congregations ; and this salutary provision, though bearing hard upon some most respectable individuals, has effectually guarded against a most shameful abuse of the toleration, which called loudly for reformation. I do not think that any remaining abuses, as far as I can learn, are of sufficient magnitude to merit the attention of Government.

“ Of this letter, my dear Sir, you will have the goodness to excuse the intrusion, and you will make what use of it you please. Not an individual knows of my writing it. But if any communication could be made, either from yourself or from your friend, which would contribute to allay the apprehensions which have been excited by the late notice and motions, it would be gratefully received. At any rate, you may depend upon it, that nothing shall be com-

municated by me without permission from you. In the mean time I remain, &c.

“THOMAS BELSHAM.

“I was talking a few days ago with the Duke of Grafton upon the subject, whose ideas coincide with mine.”

This motion was afterwards withdrawn, but a similar one was made by the noble Viscount in the year 1810, upon which a bill was introduced tending to limit the benefits of the Toleration Act, which justly excited the greatest alarm, and was strenuously and successfully opposed, petitions against the proposed act being presented from all quarters, and from every denomination of Dissenters, including the great mass which constitute the societies of the Methodists. Of the part Mr. Belsham took in this business notice will be taken in its proper place.

The Improved Version of the New Testament, which was published in 1808, and of which Mr. Belsham was the principal editor, was severely attacked in the Quarterly Review, and Mr. Belsham thought himself called upon to repel the charges, and to expose the cavils and misrepresentations of the anonymous writer. This he did in two letters, which are published in the Monthly Repository for 1809, pp. 373 and 415. His justification of the conduct of the editors and of the work is complete and satisfactory to a candid mind, and whatever errors or imperfections may be attributed to the design or execution of the work, as a whole, it was

highly approved by many able judges, and was well received by those who were not servilely attached to the authorized translation. Though a better version may yet be a desideratum, it may be said, whoever engages in the attempt will find considerable assistance from this work; and no one who wishes to be acquainted with the true meaning of Scripture language will disregard the short, but often useful and valuable notes which are attached to it.

It will appear from the following letter, that the ‘Improved Version’ was held in considerable estimation by at least one of the dignitaries of the Established Church.

To the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“ 11, *Montague Square*, March 6, 1809.

“ SIR,

“ I have been prevented from acknowledging before this time your very obliging present, by not accurately knowing how to direct to you; but I now beg you to accept my best thanks both for the Sermon* and Translation, and for the improvement as well as entertainment which I received from the clear and well-written introduction to the latter. That our opinions should perfectly coincide in the interpretation of many disputed and doubtful passages, is no more to be expected than that two persons should agree at once in casting up a long and intricate sum, especially when fractions are taken (as they too often are) into the account; but it is

* On the death of the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey.

always pleasing to see the sentiments of a respectable scholar, and the ingenuity with which he supports them. I repeat, therefore, with truth, that you have done me a great favour, and I shall always esteem your work as a valuable addition to my library. I am, Sir, your obliged servant,

“ W. CLOYNE (BENNET).”

The following letter contains the opinion of the respectable writer on this subject; but it will be more interesting, on account of the description which it gives of the state of Unitarianism in the United States of North America, and as it forms a supplement to the sketch which Mr. Belsham has given of the extension of Unitarian principles in his *Memoirs of the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey*, chap. ix. p. 238.

To the Rev. T. BELSHAM.

“ *Boston, Feb. 5, 1809.*

MY DEAR SIR,

“ I have to thank you for your labours upon the New Testament. I wish, with many others, that the notes were twice as numerous. But still I cannot but wish that Wakefield had been the basis. I am now reading Middleton’s doctrine of the Greek Article, who discovers the most contemptible rancour against Wakefield, merely, as it would seem, because he had not so accurate notions of the article as himself. What a noise, too, are you making about the half dozen texts which Mr. Granville Sharpe has attempted to correct! Surely that cause must be on the decline which resorts to such assistance as this.

“ Do you wish to hear any thing of American theology ? I can only tell you, that except in the little town of Boston and its vicinity, there cannot be collected, from any space of one hundred miles, six clergymen who have any conceptions of rational theology, and who would not shrink from the suspicion of antitrinitarianism in any shape.

“ In the southern and middle states, where are to be found the most popular clergy, who have what the French call *onction* and we *cant*, the higher orders of people are infidels ; the lower, fanatics ; the preachers, Scotch Calvinists. It is the prevailing idea, all over the United States, that the clergy of Boston are little better than Deists. As a specimen of the character, accomplishments, and zeal of the clergy of Philadelphia, you will get the best notion by looking into the American edition of Dr. Rees’s New Cyclopædia, or by asking Dr. Rees what he thinks of the Philadelphia theological editors.

“ The state of Connecticut, the greater part of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, is filled with what we call Hopkinsian clergymen, or the followers of Jonathan Edwards and others (especially Dr. Hopkins), who pushed the first tenets of Calvinism only to their natural consequence. A new theological institution, under the direction of ministers of their description, has just been endowed and opened within thirty miles of Boston ; its funds are derived from the extraordinary munificence of three or four well-meaning men, who think to support the cause of orthodoxy, which has been very much declining under the influence of good sense and

liberal ministers. However, the most bigoted and exclusive spirit of Calvinism seems now reviving, and perhaps gaining ground even in Boston. I have been for many months exposed to some of its deadliest shafts, in consequence of a little collection of Hymns, unorthodox, not heterodox, which I have made for the use of my society. However, we shall stand our ground very firmly in Boston. There is no place on the face of the globe where so much attention is paid to ministers by all ranks, especially the most polished. Those very men who in New York and Philadelphia would probably be infidels, because they could not be Calvinists, are among us in Boston rational Christians; the most constant supporters of public worship, the most intimate friends of the clergy, and not a few *professors* of Christianity. Our only danger is in our security and strength. ‘In such an hour as we think not, sudden destruction may come upon us,’ but I think there is root of rationality and soberness in Boston which can, with God’s blessing, never fail to spring and flourish here, except by the culpable indifference of its cultivators.

“Mr. Freeman, whose name you well know, and who is the only professed Unitarian minister among us, has lately had a colleague associated with him, a young man of much promise. - It is impossible that this church should ever relinquish the Unitarian liturgy. As Lessing somewhere says, ‘When a people have once got the idea of the ONE, it is impossible to lose it.’

“Our American edition of Griesbach is nearly printed at the University press at Cambridge. I

shall take the trouble of compiling and collecting a supplementary volume, to contain a translation of his Prolegomena, the *authorities* for his variations, and some miscellaneous matter, which I hope to make useful to theological students.

“We are reprinting your edition of Newcome, though without much encouragement, which indeed can hardly be expected. But it is a great thing to have a book accessible and in print. Nescit vox missa reverti. Some will and must meet with it and read it, who would not encourage it. You will not blame me, I know, if I should make some few alterations in pointing, and perhaps add two or three notes at the end.

“I am extremely impatient, my dear Sir, for your work on the Epistles. I am in general much pleased with Macknight. I need not tell you, that the great difficulty in Paul’s Epistles lies in about half a dozen words. If I could settle their meaning I should bless God all my life. Yours with the highest regard,

“J. S. BUCKMINSTER.”

To the SAME.

“*Boston, December 5, 1809.*

“MY DEAR SIR,

“It gives me the highest pleasure to hear from you, especially in the present state of our affairs, when I fear that every letter may be the last. By the strangest mismanagement, the ease or the folly of Erskine, the obliquity and timid cunning of our own government, and the pride of yours, we seem

to have come at last to the very brink of a rupture. I have never before felt so much concerned as at this moment, lest a declaration of hostilities should, at last, be reluctantly extorted from your government. We are sufficiently satisfied here, that our own could not be whipped into such a measure; and yet they have unaccountably left you in circumstances, by the rejection of your minister, in which I tremble for the steps you may be justified in taking. However, I am determined yet to believe, that your administration will be wise enough to leave us to ourselves.

“I am always mortified when I find you expressing such confident expectations of America, and such high sentiments of its religious freedom and spirit of improvement. The truth is, that except in Boston and its immediate vicinity, the most bigoted Calvinism prevails among the regular part of the clergy, and the Baptists and Methodists of every description are the only sectarians known. The Presbyterian churches in New York are not less narrow and intolerant than the most despotic portion of the original Kirk of Scotland; and what is yet more to be lamented, the Congregational churches of Connecticut and Vermont have formed a partial union with the Presbyterian church in the United States, and sent deputies to the General Assembly at Philadelphia. We are, as yet, independent in Massachusetts; and, though with some inconveniences, retain our old Congregational connexion, subject to no platform, subscribers to no articles, and united only so far as we please with one another, exchanging with whom we please, and

acting with those only with whom we find we can best agree. But there is among us an increasing party of Calvinists and Hopkinsians, who wish to promote a more *exclusive* union, on the basis of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and who will, therefore, form a schism in our Congregational connexion, and separate from *us*, and probably send delegates to the General Assembly. They are not yet the majority in our state, and it is much hoped that they never will be.

“ I hope you have, ere this, received our American Griesbach. We have been much surprised and pleased with the Eclectic Review of the Improved Version. It is very laborious, and surprisingly candid for them. There is one foolish note about S. Crellius, taken from La Trobe, which I strongly suspect to be a pious fraud. The review in the Quarterly Review was not worthy of reply, except as it came forward under the patronage of the powerful. I look with impatience for your opus magnum. May God watch over your health, and give you an intimate knowledge of the apostolic doctrines ! With great respect, yours sincerely,

“ J. S. BUCKMINSTER.*

* Mr. Buckminster died on June 9th. Mr. Belsham takes notice of this event in his diary, with the following eulogium on his character : “ He was a man of most extraordinary talent, piety, learning, and eloquence. His sentiments upon religious subjects were very correct, and to his exertions, the friends of free inquiry looked with pleasing expectation for the promotion of the cause of Christian truth in that city and neighbourhood. ‘ But God seeth not as man seeth ;’ and, when the proper season comes, he will raise up instruments abundantly sufficient to accomplish his sovereign will. For

“ P. S. What I have written in the beginning of this letter upon the subject of our differences with England, was set down in the fulness of the impression made upon my mind by the reading of Mr. Jackson’s correspondence. That a convention would ever have been concluded with *him*, is very improbable ; and so our President seems to have determined to take the first opportunity which he could make or find, to get rid of him.”

The following extract of a letter from William Wells,† Esq., is of a later date, (June 10, 1810,) but is inserted here, as connected with the subject of the preceding letters :

“ I have barely time at present to inclose a small parcel, consisting of some late sermons by clergymen of this town and its vicinity—that of Dr. Griffin will give you a specimen of the tenets and talents of the bigoted Calvinists, who have built a very handsome new chapel, and are making great exertions to perpetuate and extend their doctrines. Vain hope ! Their place of worship must follow the fate of other places of worship in this town, established to perpetuate the most rigid principles of the Scotch Presbyterian and the English Episcopal churches ; all the zeal and jealous foresight

twelve months before his death, he was subject to frequent suspension of his faculties, which would sometimes seize him in the pulpit, and interrupt the service for five minutes, or more. After death his skull was opened, and there appeared to be a projecting part, which pressed upon the brain and produced those alarming symptoms which ultimately terminated in his death.”

† Son of the Rev. William Wells, of Bromsgrove, who emigrated with his family to America, where he lived greatly respected.

of whose founders have not availed to prevent their becoming Unitarian chapels, almost before they (the founders) were cold in their graves.”

With these accounts of the state of Unitarianism in the United States, at this period, it is curious and encouraging to contrast the representations which are now made of the rapid and extensive spread of the Unitarian doctrine. When Dr. Priestley arrived in America, every pulpit was closed against him. At this time there are said to be more than a hundred churches avowedly Unitarian. The zeal, the intrepidity, and the eloquence of the advocates of the plain and simple truths of the gospel, in a country where professors of all religious opinions are equally protected, are making that impression which might justly be expected; and the labours of a Tuckerman, a Channing, and others scarcely less ardent, or laborious, or diligent, or persuasive, are winning thousands to the pure faith of the gospel, and to the practice which it inculcates.

The following was the last letter which Mr. Belsham received from his respected friend and predecessor at Daventry, the Rev. Thomas Robins, and probably the last written by that truly excellent and amiable man:

“MY VERY KIND AND DEAR SIR,

“IT was a serious addition to the pain of my late indisposition to be deprived of the company and encouragement of many of my best and dearest friends, after having been taught by themselves to expect them. The kindness of your motive for

withholding that intended favour I readily admit, and am thankful for ; and, indeed, for all your conduct towards me during the many years of our connexion and intercourse. And in addition to all past instances, I have now to acknowledge, with particular pleasure and thankfulness, your late proof of sympathy and kindness in the welcome letter and acceptable present I received a few days ago. And as our neighbour is to set out for London this evening, I once more attempt to write my acknowledgment, though, as you will perceive,* very unfit to do it. I desire, indeed, to be very thankful that I have recovered more ability than I, or any of my friends, once expected ; but still, except during short and defective intervals, I am utterly unable to think, or write, or converse in a manner not mortifying and painful to my friends, and much more to myself. Your kind partiality, indeed, ascribes to me excellencies which I am ashamed not to possess, and comforts which I neither enjoy nor expect, in any considerable degree. I desire, however, to be thankful that things are no worse with me ; and as to what awaits me, either to do, to enjoy, or to bear, I desire to leave all to that God who knows, with intuitive certainty, what is fittest and best for me ; and who, I have some, though generally a feeble and fluctuating hope, will conduct me by a right way to the city of habitation, where I shall find all ‘the excellent of the earth’ whom I have known, and yourself in particular, ranking much higher than myself in attainments and feli-

* From the original, in short hand, being very imperfectly written.

city. May this hope be an anchor to my soul in life and in death, and not make me ashamed beyond it! Though much better than I have been, I feel myself sinking very fast into that state of bodily and mental debility, which your excellent friend Mr. Lindsey, and a thousand others, distinguished far beyond me in talents, usefulness, and comfort, have experienced. I would cheerfully follow the footsteps of the flock, and may but strength be imparted equal to the day and all issue well, and the will of God be done. My ability to move, in any way, fails me very much, and I fear I shall be entirely confined to my own house during the winter months, if I should be spared through them, which I can scarcely expect or desire to be. ‘Father, glorify thy name.’

“ Though incapable of writing to any purpose, I can yet read the communications of my friends, and shall always be particularly thankful for yours, either in the way of information or encouragement. We are always thankful for any intelligence you may be able or inclined to impart; as but little, either public or private; civil or ecclesiastical, now reaches us. The Jubilee has of late engaged general attention, and been observed here in a very friendly and proper manner, if you will admit that to be possible. As to peace, however we may wish for it, we can scarcely expect one, either advantageous or durable; and any good from the war, I fear, is now improbable and impossible, though I know, and rejoice in the thought, that God can bring the greatest good out of the most distressing

evil, and will do it, to the astonishment and delight of all his believing and obedient people.

“ If you knew at how many times, and by how many painful and mortifying efforts, I have produced the above miserable scrawl, you would not be severe on its faults, though you could not commend its excellencies. It is probably the last I shall ever write of any length, except perhaps one to Mr. Palmer, to whom I owe my best respects and thanks, if I can summon up a sufficient degree of ability and resolution. At least I hope to be able to testify my gratitude and Christian affection to him, and to thousands to whom I have never been able to pay a due regard below, in that world of perfect love and joy, to the hope of which we are raised by the promises and provisions of the everlasting gospel. My own particular connexions are in usual health and comfort, and so far as they know of my writing, unite in respectful compliments and best wishes for yourself and all your nearest connexions, with, dear Sir, your obliged and ever affectionate friend and humble servant,

“ THOMAS ROBINS.

“ *Daventry, Oct. 30, 1809.*”

In the course of this year Mr. Belsham exerted himself in promoting a subscription to purchase an annuity for the relief of the Rev. Francis Stone, who had been deprived of the Rectory of Cold Norton, in the county of Essex, worth £300 per annum, being reduced, at the age of seventy-two, with a family of a wife and seven children, some of

them very young, to a state of extreme indigence and distress. Mr. Stone's offence was preaching a sermon, at the visitation of the Archdeacon, containing doctrines contrary to those of the Established Church. Mr. Belsham regarded the conduct of Mr. Stone as highly imprudent, and the publication of his sermon, and the defence of it, as injudicious and weak; but the severity with which the offence was visited entitled him to compassion, and Mr. Belsham very kindly endeavoured to induce his friends and others to contribute to the relief of the unfortunate sufferer, and his efforts were not in vain.

But another object which he had in view, and in which his whole heart was engaged, was to effect a similar purpose for the benefit of Mrs. Lindsey, "who, though left in a decent competency, had not the means of indulging her generous feelings in the manner to which she had been accustomed, without encroaching too far upon those personal and domestic comforts which become more necessary as life declines." On making this statement to the Duke of Northumberland, Mr. Lindsey's early friend, his Grace generously contributed £100, and the subscription was soon completed. This was done without Mrs. Lindsey's knowledge. With the sum of £800, an annuity of £100 was purchased; but Mrs. Lindsey, then entering upon her seventieth year, lived but a short time to enjoy it.

In the list of friends removed by death, Mr. Belsham particularly mentions that of Wm. Rathbone, Esq., of Green-bank, near Liverpool, February 11th, with the following encomium:

“ A man of very superior abilities, of the greatest integrity and piety, and the most liberal principles. The first merchant in Liverpool. A person whose death made greater impression in America than that of any other individual in this country could have done.”

The following extracts are from a letter of this gentleman to Mr. Belsham, dated May 9, 1805 :

“ Richard (Mr. Rathbone’s son, who was then a pupil at Hackney) may probably have informed you that I was, some weeks ago, disowned by the Quakers. You know it was an event which caused me no surprise, nor, on my own account, any concern. Indeed, I feel myself more unshackled as a Christian, and more independent as a man, than I had ever before done. I trust I have never temporized or prevaricated ; but while I was one of the Society I thought it right to concede in many respects, and with regard to some opinions to preserve silence, where the contrary might have no other effect but to raise the arm of *power* rather than of *reason*. I am now free, as it respects my fellow-creatures ; yet I hope to remember that I have still one Father and one Master, and that to him I must finally stand or fall.

“ If I am not to congratulate you on the attainment of higher dignity, I may at least present you with warm and sincere wishes for health and ability to fulfil the duties of a situation of increased importance in the chapel in Essex Street. I have always felt a great interest in the reputation and well-doing of that congregation. I consider them as the advocates and guardians of some very impor-

tant interests ; and most ardently do I wish that the minister and the people may vie with each other in adorning and recommending the *pure* doctrines of Christ. Were there no other reason for good wishes on behalf of that institution, a benevolent mind could not restrain the desire, that our excellent friend Mr. Lindsey might leave this earthly scene under every impression of hope and comfort which his founding and pastoral care entitle him to feel.”

Mr. Belsham concludes his observations on the occurrences of the past year with the following remarks :

“ I feel much anxiety about my public services ; but I must endeavour to do my duty and leave events to God.

“ O my God, my soul is disquieted within me, therefore will I remember thee. I will call to mind thy past goodness, and will learn to confide in thy paternal care. ‘ My faith hath often failed, but thy mercy hath never failed.’ Do with thy servant as seemeth good in thy sight, only cast me not out of thy presence, and banish me not to an eternal distance from thyself. Be thou my wisdom in the day of perplexity, my strength in the day of trial, and my consolation in the day of sorrow ; my guide through life, my support in death, and my portion for ever. Amen and amen.”

The sixtieth return of his birth-day naturally called forth Mr. Belsham’s grateful acknowledgment of the goodness of Divine Providence, and the serious consideration of the short period of life

which might be supposed to remain. These are expressed in his diary in the following manner :

“Thursday evening, April 26.—I have this day completed my sixtieth year. I have now entered upon what may be called the last decade of human life, the close of which I shall probably not live to see. What I most wonder at as age advances is, that hitherto I have suffered so little of the inconveniences and infirmities of age. Hitherto I have been as much exempt from pain and suffering of all kinds as any one ever was. Blessed be the distinguishing goodness of God ! What remains of life must be very short, and I have still much work to do ; more than I can perform. The Improved Version, and defences of it, have occupied much of my time, and of late, the Memoir of Mr. Lindsey, which I desire to make instructive, interesting, and edifying. But the time it occupies is beyond all calculation. If, however, the end is answered, I shall not grudge the labour nor the disappointment of my own schemes.”

“Sunday evening, July 1.—I am now reduced to the situation I have long foreseen and expected, and for which my mind ought to have been better prepared. I parted yesterday with my last pupil, and I must now live on a reduced establishment, with an income considerably diminished. My mind is disquieted within me. I am but ill fitted to play the subtle game of life, or to struggle with difficulties. But, O my soul ! ‘trust thou in God, for I shall yet praise him.’ Call to mind the frequent, the signal, the seasonable interposition of

Divine Providence in thy behalf. How often have I been ready to despond ! how often has faith been ready to fail ! but when did the faithfulness and loving-kindness of God forsake me ! In the mount of danger, in the crisis of despair, he has raised me from the gulph, and set my feet upon a rock. O, why cannot I trust his power and goodness for the few remaining stages of my earthly pilgrimage ? ‘ Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief.’ Forgive my foolish and criminal fears, and help me to cast my burdens upon thee. I shall now have more leisure. O let these hours be devoted to God—to doing good. I have a great work before me, and but a short time to execute extensive plans. O let not a day be lost, and may God grant all needful assistance, and command his efficacious blessing.”

“ December 31.—This year I have sustained some painful losses in the number of my aged friends. I shall very soon have few acquaintance that are older than myself ; and it cannot be very long before I shall be summoned to follow my fathers and brethren to the dark mansions of the grave. Among the deaths that I have recorded are,

“ April 10, Mrs. Rickards, of Birmingham, one of my earliest and kindest friends, the last of the Hunts, with whom I was once so intimate. I have no doubt they are all safe. O that I may have a happy meeting with them again, where friendships shall never be dissolved !

“ May 20, the Rev. Thomas Robins,* of Da-

* The Rev. George Watson in communicating to Mr. Belham the

ventry; my good old friend and predecessor in the pulpit and the Academy. He had been long in a declining state.

"June 10, the Rev. Dr. Barnes, of Manchester, an able and popular preacher."

"Sept. 4, Joseph Paice, Esq., at 83. An Israelite indeed! A character for integrity, mildness, firmness, generosity, of distinguished excellence."

The following extracts are from letters before the writer, referring to these events:

"You have of course seen an account of the death of our excellent friend Mrs. Rickards. She is the last of my contemporaries in a family among whom I have passed some of the happiest hours of life. This is to me a solemn memento, that my own time is almost gone, and that the remaining sands are few and will soon run out. This makes me the more anxious to finish the little work which remains for me to do, and which I may be qualified to perform. It is a pleasure to think, that the cause for which I have in my humble measure both laboured and suffered, is not mortal, like its advocates; but that it will advance and make its way, when the lips of its faithful promulgators shall be sealed in silence. I am often astonished to see the difference between the state of things at present,

intelligence of Mr. Robins' illness and death, says, "He has been very composed and comfortable in his mind in the prospect of his great change, during the time of his illness, at least as far as I have witnessed. But he has suffered much in the body, so that he told me some time since, that if it would please God to dismiss him he should be ~~very~~ thankful. He was very often expressing his earnest desire, ~~for~~ generous faith and patience to the last, and there is no ~~in~~ he had his wish."

and what it was twenty or thirty years ago, when a Unitarian or Socinian was a sort of monster, at which people gazed as an unusual phenomenon. They now abound every where and are multiplying daily.

“I suppose from your letter, that Dr. Barnes is dead, and I hear, from various quarters, rumours of this event. But is it not extraordinary, that a man so deservedly eminent should not have one friend to insert this event in the London papers, or to write a single sentence in his praise?*

This would not have been the case if the late Dr. Percival had been living. I always had a great respect for Dr. Barnes, and considered him as a worthy, able, pious man; though I think that popularity was too much his idol. It will not be easy to find another Arian to supply his place.

“I should have been glad to have paid my tribute of respect to our old friend Mr. Robins; but I am too much engaged with Mr. Lindsey to allow the time that would be necessary.”

Application was made to Mr. Belsham to write an epitaph for his departed friend. In its original state it was too long to be inscribed upon a tombstone, and was judiciously abridged by the late Rev. Thomas Northcote Toller, “who had a peculiar intimacy with Mr. Robins from the time that he finished his studies under his direction to the last

* Ample justice was done to the character and talents of this active and benevolent man, in a funeral sermon by the Rev. John Yates, of Liverpool, which was published; and also by the Rev. Joseph Bealey, of Cockey Moor, Lancashire, who has given a brief, but well-written Memoir of his friend, in the Monthly Repository, Vol. V. p. 408.

period of his life. Mr. Toller delivered a pathetic discourse to his own congregation at Kettering on the sabbath following the interment, on 2 Kings ii. 12: ‘My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof,’ &c., when, after a just encomium on the virtues of the deceased, he added, ‘There may have been more brilliant, striking, nay, useful characters ; but taking him altogether, and considering his character as a whole, it was the most consistent, accurate, and complete, that I ever knew. Many a time have I left his company with this reflection—surely this is *the disciple whom Jesus loves.*’ The clergyman also, who officiated at Mr. Robins’s funeral, bore an honourable testimony to his worth, in the presence of a large company of attendants at the house of mourning.” *

The Dissenters have no burial-ground at Daventry, and Mr. Robins’s remains were interred in the churchyard. For a copy of the inscription as engraved upon his tomb-stone, the present writer is obliged to Mr. Line, of Daventry.

Underneath this stone
are deposited the remains
of the Rev. THOMAS ROBINS,
who was born Oct. 1732,
and died May 1810.
His native superiority of understanding,
and
respectable attainments in various departments
of science and literature
were combined
with an ardent love of truth,

* Rev. George Watson’s Memoir of the Rev. Thomas Robins.

inflexible integrity, fervent piety,
universal charity, unaffected humility,
active benevolence,
and a winning courtesy of manners,
which rendered him the delight,
not only
of his family and friends,
but
of all, of every persuasion,
who were favoured with his acquaintance,
and qualified to appreciate his worth.
By a mysterious dispensation of Providence,
in the midst of life and vigour,
he was laid aside from an office
of distinguished honour and usefulness,
which he had occupied with high reputation,
and in the shade of retirement
beautifully exemplified
the efficacy of those christian principles
which he was no longer permitted
publicly to teach.

In 1811, Mr. Belsham preached and published a sermon on the death of the Duke of Grafton,* in which he gives a concise and interesting account of the life and character of this distinguished nobleman, who had been a regular attendant on public worship at Essex-street Chapel, and who greatly respected its excellent founder and his successor, whom he honoured with his friendship. This mark of respect was well received and politely acknowledged by her Grace the Duchess, and by the ladies of the family.

The following letter was addressed to Mr. Bel-

* A short Memoir of his Grace may be seen in the Monthly Repository, Vol. VI. p. 245.

sham, on his expressing a wish to present a copy of this sermon to the writer :

“REV. SIR,

“Many years ago, the Duke of Grafton told me, that some of my little publications first turned his Grace’s attention to religious inquiries, and I feel at this moment great happiness at the result which has attended his investigation.

“He has long been a Christian of the best description, one who expects a future state of gospel retribution, and who considers that state as the gift of God through Jesus Christ.

“I have long been acquainted with and admired your various works, and shall be most happy to receive the tribute you have paid to the memory of our friend. I am, Rev. Sir, with great esteem,

“Your faithful servant,

“R. LANDAFF.

“*Calgarth Park, May 8, 1811.*”

In the same year appeared a work which had been frequently revised and remodelled, entitled, “A Calm Inquiry into the Scripture Doctrine concerning the Person of Christ,” on which Mr. Belsham had bestowed much attention, and taken great pains to make a complete and accurate enumeration of the several passages of the New-Testament Scriptures which are supposed to relate to this subject, and to give a faithful account of the sense in which they had been understood and interpreted by eminent writers of various religious sentiments. This was done upon a larger scale, as the lectures

were originally drawn up for the use of the students at Daventry, but when they were addressed to the younger members of his congregation at Hackney and at Essex Street, he contented himself with attaching to the several passages that sense which appeared to him to be the sense in which the expressions were used by the sacred writers, and with adverting occasionally to the opinions of commentators, which, in the published work, are generally given in the notes. Mr. Belsham's great object is to shew that there is no evidence from the writings of the evangelists and apostles, that they knew any thing of a pre-existent state and dignity which their revered and beloved Master enjoyed before his appearance on earth ; but that he was regarded by the historians of his life and ministry as "a man approved of God by signs and miracles and wonders, which God did by him." The selection of these passages, as mentioned in the preface to the work, was originally made with the expectation that a conviction the reverse of this would be the result of the investigation. It operated, however, in a different manner, both on the persons for whose consideration the selection was first made, and upon Mr. Belsham himself, who in the same preface has given an interesting description of the slow and gradual manner in which the change was produced in his own sentiments and convictions, and of the impression made upon his mind by observing the earlier effect upon the minds of his pupils. Whether it be considered as the best method of studying this and similar subjects or not, it must be allowed to contribute very essentially to the attainment of a just notion

of what the Scriptures teach, and of what the writers believed and inculcated as the doctrine of Christ.

Mr. Belsham presented a copy of the above-mentioned sermon and of this work to the late Samuel Whitbread, Esq., M. P., with whose friendship he was honoured through life, and for whom he entertained very great respect. The following is the acknowledgment with which this attention was honoured:

“DEAR SIR,

“I have received the favour of your note, together with the two publications accompanying it. The sermon upon the death of the Duke of Grafton I have read with great satisfaction. I believe you do perfect justice to the memory of a very good man, and the very interesting quotation you give in one of the notes upon that sermon, of a conversation between Mr. Whiston and the Lord Chancellor of the day, comes home to one’s feelings with such electrical force, that I must forthwith proceed to the perusal of your larger work, sure, as I always am, to find in all your works that dispassionate reasoning and patient inquiry after truth, together with that freedom in proclaiming it, which form your great characteristics; and I hope I shall carry to the perusal of it a mind susceptible of the truth, candid and bold to acknowledge it, when found. Years advance, and the matter becomes every day of more importance. I am, my dear Sir, faithfully yours,

“S. WHITBREAD.

“*Dover Street, May 3, 1811.*”

The subsequent letter is from one of Mr. Belsham's pupils, who distinguished himself by his open and manly avowal of his change of sentiments, after a long-continued and diligent investigation of the Scriptures upon the important doctrines of the Unity of God and the proper humanity of Jesus Christ.

“Sidmouth, May 14, 1811.

“MY DEAR SIR,

“Nothing could have been more acceptable to me, both as a proof of your personal regard, and as a book of *full* information and constant reference upon the subject on which it treats, than the valuable present which I have just received from Exeter, of your ‘Calm Inquiry into the Scripture Doctrine concerning the Person of Christ.’—I have no doubt but in examining it I shall recognize much of what I have already in MS. of yours upon the subject, and discover a great deal more, which your repeated meditations and researches have suggested and collected. — I hope *now* nothing will prevent your completing your earnestly-expected work upon the Epistles.—May God, who I trust will make your peculiarly perspicuous and luminous writings greatly instrumental in removing the rubbish which ages of corruption have accumulated upon the fair fabric of primitive Christianity, preserve your health and vigour for this purpose—for till the doctrine of Atonement, with all its ramifications, is shewn to be not only not contained in the Christian Scriptures, but a very gross corruption of them, I cannot expect that pure practical virtue can greatly flourish

among us. To prove that the Epistles of the New Testament do not sustain this doctrine will go a great way to explode it.—We must have patience, however, — our brief span of existence, and our unavoidably limited views of things, will ever make the majestic march of Providence appear slow to us. But all is just as it should be, I have no doubt. It is our business to work and wait; in his own time God will bring every thing to pass.

“ You will not be surprised, though I am sure you will be pleased to hear, that I find increasing comfort in my present simple, and, as I am more and more persuaded, *scriptural* views of the Christian scheme. It is light, with comparatively no darkness at all.

“ Your affectionate and respectful, humble servant,
“ EDMUND BUTCHER.”

In the year 1810, Lord Sidmouth moved for a return of the number of places registered for Dissenting worship, and of preachers licensed from the beginning of the year 1760 to the end of the year 1808, on which, in the following session, he obtained leave to bring in a bill to guard against the abuses of the Toleration Act; by which he proposed, 1st. To restrict the right of qualifying to actual ministers of congregations; 2ndly. To restrict it further to persons arrived at years of discretion; and, 3rdly. To require persons demanding qualifications to produce certificates, signed by two or three qualified ministers of their own denomination, of their character, abilities, &c. The tendency and effect of this bill, if carried into a law, greatly alarmed the

Dissenters, and strenuous efforts were made to oppose it. Lord Sidmouth declared, and he was entitled to credit for the truth of the declaration, that the intended object of the bill was to strengthen that respect in which religion ought always to be held, and not any infringement of toleration. But whatever might be the intention of the noble mover, the effect was obvious, and happily prevented by the simultaneous and decided protest of all classes of Dissenters against any restriction of the privileges enjoyed under the existing acts. Lord Erskine moved, that the Bill be read a second time that day six months, which motion was put and passed without a division.

Mr. Belsham addressed Lord Sidmouth on the subject in a printed letter, in which he acquits the noble viscount of any intention of narrowing the principle of the Toleration Act, and professes his belief, that Lord Sidmouth only wished to prevent the illiterate and the vicious from assuming the character of religious teachers, and from availing themselves of the immunities granted by the acts of William and George III. He points out to the noble viscount particular parts of his bill which would have deprived the Dissenters of those privileges which they enjoyed under these acts, and suggests certain alterations and clauses, which would have effectually accomplished the only justifiable object of legislative interference, and which would have made the bill, if not generally approved by the Dissenters, less objectionable to them, and have prevented that strenuous opposition which

rendered it necessary for the noble viscount to abandon his purpose.

In this letter Mr. Belsham evinces how well he understood the principles of religious liberty ; and while he concurs with the framer of the bill, in wishing to encourage learning and morality, plainly and clearly shews how impossible it would be to make any specific attainments a qualification for the exercise of the Christian ministry, without infringing the right which every one has of forming his own opinions of Christian doctrine and of communicating them to others.

The termination of the 61st year of his age is thus noticed by Mr. Belsham in his diary :

“ Friday, April 26th.—It is past midnight, and the day, contrary to my wishes, has been filled with engagements to a late hour ; but I cannot permit myself to retire to rest without expressing my unfeigned gratitude to God, who is the giver and preserver of life, for his unspeakable goodness in having brought me in so much comfort to the entrance of my sixty-second year. When I review the years that are past I hardly know how to believe that I am so far advanced in the pilgrimage of life, especially when I consider how little I have suffered from bodily pain. I have, however, many warnings, that my continuance in this life will be short. My friends and contemporaries, one after another, are taking their flight, and I feel surprised to find myself surrounded by a new generation. The shadows of the evening are lengthening upon me. My time is very short, and I am anxious to finish

the work which remaineth for me to do. But I feel that this must be far short of that with which I once flattered myself. But I am thankful for what I am permitted to do; and I humbly pray, that my own great unworthiness, a sense of which lies so heavy upon my mind, may not be made a hindrance to the progress of truth and virtue. Do with thy servant, O God, as seemeth good in thy sight. Let not those who wait upon thee, be ashamed for my sake, and let no imperfection or demerit of the instrument impede the success of thy glorious gospel.”

During the autumn of this year Mr. Belsham met with an accident, which at first appeared of trifling consequence, but proved to be attended with serious and even alarming effects. The account which he gives of this incident in his diary, and of the impression which it eventually made upon his mind, when he had reason to think it might terminate fatally, is peculiarly interesting and affecting.

“Thursday, August 8.—I am now at home, writing in my own study with my leg resting upon a chair, and under some apprehension of severe inflammation. I expected to have been at Easton Gray,* with friends whom I respect and love. I went to town on Thursday. In returning, as I was getting into the coach my foot slipped, and I struck my shin against the edge of the step. When I came home I found the part bruised and swelled. I immediately sent to Mr. Hacon, who told me I must

* The residence of his esteemed friend and pupil Thomas Smith, Esq.

rest for a fortnight, and sent me a lotion. The next morning I was better; the swelling much abated. I prepared for my journey. Dr. Pett looked at the wound and thought it safe for me to travel; but Mr. Hacon said he feared the consequences would be serious, as there would certainly be inflammation, and probably ulceration. Upon this I gave up the intention of going. I think this is the first disappointment of a journey that I ever experienced, and in all its circumstances nothing could be more mortifying. It requires all my philosophy to acquiesce with cheerfulness.

“Still, however, I have abundant reason for thankfulness. When I consider the dangerous and even fatal consequences which sometimes follow from accidents of this kind, and the very alarming aspect which the wound bore at first, I am very thankful that I am as well as I now feel myself. The swelling has greatly subsided, and I feel little or no pain or inconvenience. But I am told by the surgeons that all is not yet over; that inflammation will come on, and that the confinement must continue very rigid for more than a week to come; that suppuration will certainly take place, and that the great object must be to keep it down as much as possible. I should suppose, from the seriousness with which they speak of it, that they were apprehensive of serious consequences, while, as far as my own feelings and judgment are concerned, I should expect very little inconvenience indeed. But I wish to be prepared for whatever is to happen, and to resign myself to the all-wise disposal of the Author of my existence, the sovereign

arbiter of life and death. I praise him for all that is past, I trust him for all that is to come.”

“Friday evening, August 16.—Our fathers, where are they, and what am I better than my fathers? Is it not possible that this seemingly trifling accident, which I at first regarded merely as the affair of an hour, may be attended with serious consequences, and, in fact, may be the messenger or prelude to my dismissal from the abodes and concerns of mortality?

“My professional friend always appears serious when he visits me. It is plain the thing does not go on agreeably to his wishes and expectations. There is a mystery in his looks and language; and I well know that such complaints are insidious, often most dangerous when least painful.

“But let the worst be supposed. I am now in my sixty-second year. My race is almost finished. Little work is left for me to do. ‘I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith.’ ‘I know in whom I have believed.’ The good cause is in good hands: it will go on and triumph. Lindsey, and Jebb, and Priestley are no more; but the leaven which they have infused is working its way. The spark which they kindled has produced a flame which cannot be extinguished. I have been honoured, O how far beyond my deserts! as an instrument in carrying forward the same glorious cause of Christian truth. But my labours are nearly over, and my removal will produce a chasm hardly perceptible, and easily filled up.

“And how could this solemn and inevitable hour

overtake me at a fitter season, or in a more eligible manner? Not to mention the portentous state of the political world, the alarming situation of public affairs, the danger of national ruin, of private distress, of personal want, these are considerations upon which I lay but little stress; though as far as they go they have a tendency to reconcile the mind to leaving this disturbed state of things, in which a ray of light scarcely breaks through the thick and substantial gloom. But, independent of these considerations, as it is appointed to all men once to die, as my turn must inevitably come, as death cannot, in the course of nature, be very remote, why may it not come now? Why not in the manner which now appears in prospect?

“ Besides this—the friends of my youth are gone.—Those whom I loved, and who loved me with parental or fraternal affection are already at rest. Why should I be unwilling to go where the Ortons, the Pickards, the Ashworths, and Robins’, the Priestleys and Lindseys are already gone! To sleep in the same dust, to rest under the same protection, to lie down with the same hope!

“ If the gospel be true, a future life is certain. ‘ If Jesus died and rose again, those also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.’ There will be a resurrection both of the just and the unjust. Where, then, O where will my portion be, and what is the sentence I must expect to hear from an omniscient, a just, and a merciful Judge!—This is the momentous question.—I profess not an ostentatious humility, nor am I ignorant of those features of my moral character, or of those parts of my conduct in

life, upon which I can reflect with satisfaction. I have done and I have sacrificed many things in the uprightness of my heart, and from a sense of duty. Some of these sacrifices have been public, others have been more private, for which, as I did not seek, so I have not obtained, credit of my fellow-creatures. So far is well.

“ But I am also conscious of innumerable errors, frailties, and transgressions, the number and the circumstances of which are continually present to my recollection, and press with insupportable weight upon my mind—and these sad reflections will not suffer me to entertain those lively and unclouded hopes which have gilded the closing scene, and softened the dying pillow, of some of my departed friends.

“ And do I then give way to despair? God forbid. The forbearing, the restraining, the preventing mercy of God has been so great, so wonderful, so distinguishing, that I am willing to hope that mercy is after all in reserve for one who is, in some respects, disposed to regard himself as ‘ the chief of sinners.’ Is not this very accident, which confines me at home and gives birth to the present meditation, an additional instance of mercy; and if I should even now be removed from a state in which usefulness is almost over, and in which trials remain with almost unabated force, would not even this event be a proof of boundless mercy?

“ And am I not going to the same kind Parent who hath hitherto been so merciful to me? ‘ If I make my bed in the grave, behold he is there.’

And will he be less merciful to me hereafter? Will He banish me from his own presence with whom I have often held the sweetest communion; who knows all my sincerity, as well as, alas! all my frailty? And will he forbid me the society of those whom I here loved and valued, and whose friendship and conversation I have preferred to all the treasures upon earth? Unworthy as I am of their society, cannot he by the purifying process of the grave, raise me to a state fit to enjoy their company and friendship, without any of those moral taints which now disqualify me for pure and perfect felicity?

“O thou God of infinite mercy and long-suffering goodness, thou knowest the heart of thy servant; thou hast been witness to all my fears and prayers, and inward conflicts, as well as to the infirmity of my best resolutions, and to my deeply-rooted and bitterly-lamented imperfections. I cast myself wholly upon thy mercy, upon that mercy which is essential to thy nature, which is displayed in all thy works, which is fully revealed in the gospel of Christ, which is exercised in all thy dispensations; upon that mercy of which I have had such repeated, such constant, such distinguished, such wonderful experience, and which I trust, if it be not too presumptuous a hope, which I trust will not forsake me when I most need it. O thou great arbiter of life and death—

“Thy call I follow to a land unknown;
I trust in thee, and know in whom I trust.”

“Friday, Sept. 13.—After a confinement of
in

weeks, I am so far recovered, that I am about to make a visit to Parndon.*

“To God I return thanks for his healing mercy. I was brought low and he helped me. I have suffered no pain, nor inconvenience from long confinement. I have at all times been able to read and write, and to pursue my studies ; and my spirits, in general, have been elevated rather than depressed. I have also had many visitors, and have experienced much kindness from neighbours and friends.

“For one circumstance I have much reason to be thankful. My long confinement has afforded me an opportunity of reading Mr. Lindsey’s papers, and of collecting materials to complete his Memoirs, which is the very first work that I will undertake, and which I am fully determined to finish, if God gives me health and ability. At least, if I cannot do this I will do nothing.

“For all thy great mercy to the unworthiness of thy servant, accept, O God, the grateful tribute of my heart and tongue. And may this acknowledgement be followed by corresponding conduct. May renewed health be devoted to thy service, and let me be content to be employed in the way which thy providence marks out, esteeming it the highest honour to work together with God in carrying on the great cause of truth and goodness, even in the humblest sphere.”

In the review of the year, Mr. Belsham observes, “The number of friends of whom death has bereaved me, has perhaps been rather fewer than

* The seat of William Smith, Esq., late M. P. for Norwich.

usual, but some of these events have had important consequences, others have been singularly affecting.” Among these are,

“January, in the first week, the Rev. Benjamin Davies, of Evesham, a student at Daventry, afterwards assistant tutor at Carmarthen, a man of excellent abilities and learning, and of great humility.*

“August 11, Mrs. Dodson, a woman of excellent understanding, much reading, and deep thought; well versed in metaphysical and theological subjects, but who was of a retired and unobtrusive disposition.”

In communicating the intelligence of this event to Mr. Belsham, his correspondent, Miss Rogers, says, “My excellent friend Mrs. Dodson expired this morning about two o’clock. Her strength has been rapidly declining for the last week; but most happily she continued as free from pain as she had previously been; and it is pleasing to add, that she retained her faculties, and her cheerful, thankful spirit to the last. Mrs. Lindsey called a few days ago to see her and bid her farewell; and from the accounts which Mrs. Dodson afterwards gave to me of their conversation, I may say that they parted as only Christians can part, and this circumstance occasioned not the smallest degree of perturbation to my invaluable friend, who was much gratified by the affectionate motive of Mrs. Lindsey’s visit.”

The decease of this admirable lady occurred shortly after. The following is the account which Mr. Belsham gives of this event, in his diary:

* See a just tribute to the memory of this amiable man in the *Monthly Repository*, Vol. VI. p. 251.

“On Saturday, Jan. 18, 1812, Mrs. Lindsey died after a short illness. She was rather better than usual, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, till the evening. She then became uncommonly restless, was put to bed, and never rose again. Dr. Blackburne saw her on Wednesday morning, but had not a bad opinion of her case. I saw her on Thursday. I observed that her voice was altered, that her hand was cold, and she lay perfectly still. I thought her seriously ill, but had not a desponding opinion, even though the servant told me, that when lifted out of bed she was perfectly helpless. I took leave of her after five minutes. She appeared perfectly sensible and in no pain. Afterwards she grew worse and wandered a little. She was grasping at every thing. This she did from the beginning. She fell asleep on Friday night at twelve, and slept till six in the morning. She soon changed and became restless. Dr. Blackburne came at nine and found her expiring, placed her in a less uneasy posture, and in a short time she expired.—An admirable woman, active and useful beyond all others in her day; admired, revered, beloved by her equals, and idolized by the poor. She lived just long enough to reconcile her friends to her departure, and she died quietly and without pain. Such was the reward of an eminently virtuous and useful life.

“It is an event of greater importance to me than any which has occurred since I left Daventry. It considerably increases my income, but obliges me to remove to town. I know not how this will agree with my health, but I believe it to be my

duty. The event I leave in better hands. I cannot but admire the goodness of God in the events of my life. At every crisis of importance, when I have been in doubt and difficulty, something has occurred which has opened my path and cleared my way, so as to leave me without any hesitation as to what was right. This is the case at present, and with humble gratitude I obey the voice of Divine Providence.”

The funeral sermon occasioned by the death of Mrs. Lindsey was published, in which Mr. Belsham describes the character of this excellent lady with the spirit and affection of a friend, well acquainted with her merits, and able to appreciate the virtues which she exemplified. A biographical sketch from the pen of Mrs. Cappe, her early and intimate friend, also appears in the Monthly Repository, Vol. VII. p. 109.

In this year, Mr. Belsham published a sermon, delivered on Feb. 5, the day appointed for a general Fast, in which the rights of conscience are defined and asserted with his accustomed freedom, precision, and ability. Copies of this discourse were sent to several noblemen and others, and the attention was politely acknowledged by them, particularly by Lord Holland, “who,” says Mr. Belsham, “wrote me a long letter of thanks, and endeavoured to convince me that Lord Sidmouth was more tolerant than I imagined,—to which I took the liberty to reply, that though his party were many of them very intolerant, I was convinced that Lord Sidmouth himself was not so, that is, as far as Dissenters were concerned.” Mr. Belsham adds, “It

is an important observation of Lord Holland's, in his letter to me, 'that the fears of the Church, though more *loudly expressed* against the Papists, are more *deeply felt* against other sects, especially the Methodists.' 'This,' saith he, 'is *notorious*.' He (Lord Holland) adds, 'Every day convinces me more and more, that the High-church party stickle for the right of excluding Dissenters and regulating their ministers and worship, not so much from dislike and dread of the Catholics, who are in England but an inconsiderable body, but for the purpose of retaining in their hands a weapon *tanquam in vaginâ reconditum*, which they may draw with effect when occasion offers against other sects more formidable, in this part of the country, from the numbers as well as from the spirit of inquiry which the nature of their opinions is calculated to inspire.' This is rather a formidable declaration, and it looks as if the High-church were a little uneasy at the spread of UNITARIANISM, and when Unitarianism becomes as popular as Methodism, they will indeed have reason to tremble. But as yet, 'the cloud,' which will one day overspread the hemisphere, 'is no bigger than a man's hand,' and need excite no alarm in the present generation."

In reply to Lord Holland (Mar. 26), Mr. Belsham says, "After hearing Lord Sidmouth open his case, and being delighted with your Lordship's prompt and eloquent statement of the grand principles of religious liberty in reply, I took the liberty of writing a letter of expostulation to Lord Sidmouth, in answer to which he informed me, 'that I had quite misconceived his meaning,' and desired

an interview, inviting me at the same time to make remarks upon his bill, of which he sent me a copy. Upon this occasion I cannot help conceiving Lord Sidmouth opened all his mind. It appeared to me, that his High-church prejudices had been originally strong, but that he was well-meaning and sincere; that his first intentions were hostile, particularly against itinerant preachers; but that, having had the subject long in contemplation, and conversed much upon it with persons of note, both among the Methodists and Dissenters, his views became more enlarged, and his prejudices softened down; and I verily believe, that his ultimate intention was solely to exclude from the ministry ignorant and immoral men, who could obtain no testimonials of their qualifications. Your Lordship can hardly conceive how willingly Lord Sidmouth listened to every suggestion, and how readily he acceded to every amendment, even to lopping off nearly half his bill, and modelling the remainder in a way in which it would have been almost unexceptionable. He professed his firm conviction, that every person of character should be allowed to speculate, and profess, and even to teach as he judges right upon religious subjects, and disapproves the word toleration, because her egards private judgment, in the true Protestant sense of the word, as a right, not as a boon, or a matter of discretion. It would have been curious to see the figure which his bill would have made, after having passed the ordeal of the committee.

“But I completely agree with your Lordship, that *the party* would not have been satisfied—that

the restrictions would have been retained, but the extension of liberty resisted, and that, in fact, little or no good would have accrued from suffering the bill to proceed, but that which results from the discussion of an important question, by which light is diffused, and truth is always a gainer.”

The following acknowledgments of Mr. Belsham’s attention and liberality are honourable proofs of the catholic sentiments and liberal spirit of the writers :

“ 5, *Bulstrode Street*, Mar. 31, 1812.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I return you my thanks for the obliging present of your sermon on the subject of religious liberty. There is between us a perfect concurrence of sentiment on the natural right of all men to judge of religion for themselves, and to profess what appears to them to be true, which invaluable right the gospel clearly confirms. And it may well astonish us, that our Protestant government so obstinately retains penal laws on account of religion, against every equitable feeling of the human mind, and in direct contradiction to the spirit and precepts of the gospel. Still more surprising, still more lamentable is it, that so many of the ministers of our benevolent religion, whether of the national or the various dissenting churches, should approve this conduct of our government, or even forbear to give their utmost legal assistance to free innocent individuals from every species of persecution.

“ With respect to ‘immunities,’ which governments at their discretion may grant or refuse, what

you have said appears to me to be truly said. I only wish that the numerous body of Dissenters in this metropolis had followed your example, and by signing the Christian's Petition, as you have done, had proved that your instructions, in this respect, were not wanted by them. Their brethren in the country have acted with greater liberality. The petition, the same in principle that you signed before, has now been signed by thousands of the same classes; and, introduced to parliament, as it soon will be, by statesmen most revered by the public, I trust it cannot fail to do good; and that good will be increased, if your arguments for the unfettered enjoyment of the rights of conscience by all, assisted by the generous example of their brethren, (Christians of all sects, whose petition is grounded upon that principle,) should encourage them to adopt it in similar petitions to parliament, which I am inclined to hope, from various favourable appearances, is not an improbable event. I am, with much esteem and good-will, dear Sir, yours, &c.

“C. WYVILL.”

“*Portland Place, June 10th, 1812.*”

“DEAR SIR,

“It is long ago that I was favoured with the ‘Discourse at Essex-street,’ which you were so kind as to send me, and I ought to have made earlier acknowledgment, but the fact is I had occasion, just afterwards, to make a distant journey so suddenly that I was forced to leave much undone.

“I have just read the sermon a second time. The liberty of private judgment in matters of reli-

gion is inseparable, I should think, from the faculty of reasoning, and your able assertion of this right, were my poor approbation worth your notice, I am desirous to applaud.

“ Will you excuse my remarking, that it appears to me that you lay (p. 6) greater stress upon the expression *empower* in the Toleration Act than the use of it in that act is calculated to bear. If it were not for that expression, the court of quarter sessions would have had no legal authority to administer the oath, nor would the breach of the oath been liable to the penalties of perjury. Juries by their *commission* are empowered to inquire upon oath respecting *breaches of the peace*; but where oaths of any other kind are directed to be taken before them, the power to administer the respective oath is always, *totidem verbis*, *expressly* given. There is scarcely an instance to the contrary in the whole statute book. And I take it, where justices are authorized by statute in these terms to administer an oath for the benefit of the subject, they would be compelled by **MANDAMUS** to administer the oath in case they refused.*

“ N. CONANT.”

* In writing to a friend upon this subject, Mr. Belsham thus defends his opinion: “ You are greatly mistaken in supposing that there are few magistrates who will interpret the expression *empowered* in Lord Somers’ bill, in a discretionary sense. Many are inclined to put this interpretation upon it. *I have very good reason to believe*, that if an appeal should be made to the twelve judges, they would decide in favour of the discretion of magistrates. And to say the truth, I have very little doubt that Lord Somers himself, liberal and tolerant as he was, intended to vest them with this discretion. The variation of the expression from *require* to *empower* was by far too important to have escaped the attention of a man of Lord Somers’ sagacity. And as he

In this year Mr. Belsham completed and published his "Memoirs of Mr. Lindsey," which he mentions in his diary as "his principal work, in the composition of which he found great pleasure." It certainly is a beautiful specimen of biography, particularly interesting as the delineation of the character, conduct, and disposition of a man so worthy, so amiable, so benevolent, and who imbibed so much of the spirit of his revered Master; and it is most important on account of the ample detail which it gives of the spread of those pure and genuine doctrines of the gospel, for the avowal and defence of which this venerable confessor sacrificed so much, and so assiduously and faithfully laboured.

Among other testimonies of the favourable reception of these Memoirs, the following must have been peculiarly acceptable to Mr. Belsham:

"Southill, July 28th, 1812.

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I have received the favour of your note, and the certainly knew that the words would be interpreted liberally by the friends of the revolution, I have no doubt that he intended to guard against the possibility of the sectaries ever becoming so powerful as again to overturn the church and the throne. The more I think of it the more I am convinced that this was Lord Somers' idea; and depend upon it, if an appeal is ever made to the courts of justice, the decision will surely go against the Dissenters."

In another letter to the same friend he says, "I think you will agree with me in my explanation of the Toleration Act, and in this point I flatter myself, like Lord Stanhope, that it is in my power to teach the judges law, and accordingly I told Lord Ellenborough, in a note which accompanied the discourse, that I presumed to give an opinion upon this subject, as my profession and course of reading had afforded me a peculiar opportunity of becoming acquainted with the obscure and quaint phraseology in use among the Nonconformists, when this act was passed."

book is also arrived. Both are exceedingly acceptable to me as tokens of your friendship and kind remembrance. I shall apply myself to the reading of your publication with avidity, and with the seriousness the subject deserves. I doubt not my improvement thereby, as I have never perused any of your works without great benefit. Mr. Lindsey is fortunate in such a biographer.

“ I congratulate you on the success of the Toleration Bill. From whatever causes the change has taken place, certain it is, these few last months have teemed with events beyond the hopes of the most liberal. Would to God we could add peace to religious freedom ! Of that even I do not despair.

“ My dear Sir, most truly yours,

“ S. WHITBREAD.”

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I would have acknowledged before now the favour of your valuable and interesting publication, had I not been uncertain, till this morning, whether you were not absent on a journey. The interval has given me time to read it through, and to penetrate my mind with a character, one of the purest, I think, that biography presents : for though many have been called to make, and have made greater sacrifices, few have made them from motives so simply conscientious, with such calm deliberation, without mixture of pique, or precipitancy, or vanity, or party spirit. The mind also feels refreshed and delighted with the warm and unbroken friendship between the subject of the memoir and his congenial fellow-labourers. To the characters

of himself and Dr. Priestley. you have borne a testimony for which all good men will thank you ; but I hope it will be many, very many years before the world is in possession of any similar tribute to the third of the trio of Christian friends and fellow-labourers. I am, dear Sir, your obliged and faithful

“ A. L. BARBAULD.

“ *S. Newington, August 10th, 1812.*”

“ MY DEAR FRIEND,

“ Your Memoirs of our much-esteemed and venerated friend came to my hands on Saturday. Accept my grateful acknowledgment for so valuable a present, interesting and valuable to me on many accounts. It is highly pleasing and instructive to contemplate the progress of such a mind as Mr. Lindsey's in the search after truth, and still more so to mark his undeviating integrity of heart and conduct.

“ With an earnest prayer, that you may long continue to see the good effects of your labours in the cause of religion, and to enjoy the society of your numerous friends, I remain, dear Sir, very sincerely yours,

“ R. M. LEEKE.

“ *Woodhurst, August 11th, 1812.*”

Mr. Belsham's removal to Essex House was the last important change among the many vicissitudes of his varying life. It is thus noticed in his diary :

“ Sunday evening, May 24, midnight, Hackney.

I am now going to quit a village in which I have lived for nearly twenty-three years, and a house in which I have resided sixteen years ; and under the guidance and direction of Providence, I go to reside in London, in Essex Street, not knowing what shall befall me there. One thing I am sure of, that my residence there cannot be long, and may be very short. I am a tenant upon a short lease. Some of my friends are apprehensive that want of exercise, or change of air, may have a bad effect ; but I see no reason for the first, and I feel no alarm about the second. I place my confidence in God, in that wise and merciful Providence which has hitherto guided and supported my steps ; which has brought me out of all difficulties ; which in the darkest and most trying and perplexing seasons has gently cleared my way before me, and has never left me at a loss as to the path I was to choose ; which has been better to me than all my fears ; which has far exceeded all my hopes ; whose goodness and mercy have been infinitely beyond my deserts. I have been brought low and God has helped me : I have been upon the verge of despair, and he has raised me up. In the very moment of danger and difficulty he has appeared for me, and wrought out surprising deliverance. He has put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto my God. How then can I now distrust him ? How can I doubt that he will still support and provide for me during the few remaining years or months of my mortal pilgrimage ? Why art thou cast down, O my soul ? why art thou disquieted within me ? Trust in God, for I will continue to praise him. And ‘ though I

walk through the valley of the shadow of death,' as I shortly must do, 'I will fear no evil, for God is with me.'

"O God, if thy presence go not up with me, carry me not up hence; but if thy favour is my portion, do with thy servant as seemeth good in thy sight. Let life, and health, and usefulness, and comfort, be continued and increased, if such be thy good pleasure; but if I am to be laid aside, thy will be done. I know in whom I have believed, and I am confident, that he can keep the precious deposit, the word of truth, unto that day. And I am sure that he will raise up faithful, zealous, active teachers of truth and virtue, who shall carry on the cause, with growing success, when the present generation of labourers have ended their work, and are at rest with their fathers. Amen. Hallelujah!"

"Monday evening, May 25.—Hitherto hath the Lord my God helped me. This day I have removed into Essex House; and while I reflect with wonder and with gratitude at the steps by which God hath conducted me hitherto, in a way so distant from my original expectations and prospects, and has provided so comfortable and commodious a residence for me, in the evening of life, I desire to place the most entire and dutiful confidence in his wisdom and goodness for all that lies before me. May it be my endeavour, I trust it is my ambition, to improve my talent well, and to spend my increased income in such a manner that I may not blush when called to render my account. May it be my great object, in every way, to promote the interests of truth and virtue; and may I be ever watchful,

that I may not, in any way, disgrace my profession or sin against so much light and knowledge, so much mercy and forbearance, such distinguishing, increasing, and abounding goodness. Hold me up, O God, and I shall be safe.”

Though Mr. Belsham was not more nearly connected with his congregation by his change of residence, than as he occupied the house inhabited by his venerated predecessor, he continued to exert his matured abilities, and to unfold his increased stores of knowledge for the benefit of the large and intelligent society which attended his ministry. In addition to the usual services of the Sunday, he delivered a course of lectures after the morning sermon, which were well attended, and were unquestionably the means of exciting attention to the important subjects discussed in them, and a more correct knowledge of the evidence by which they were supported. These lectures Mr. Belsham justly considered as highly important and useful; and he recommended the practice to others, alleging, that the want of success in promoting the extension of Christian truth was greatly owing to the neglect of this means of exciting attention to it.

In this year (1813) Mr. Belsham published a sermon entitled, “A Plea for the Catholic Claims,” preached in the chapel at Essex Street, March 10th, in which he asserted with great force and eloquence the right of the members of this community to the privileges of other subjects, and to exemption from those disqualifications which rendered them ineligible to civil and military offices, and exculpated them from the unjust and unfounded imputations

which were brought against their loyalty and faith. The discourse was justly admired by those who attended the delivery of it, was repeated to a much larger congregation on the following Sunday, and when printed, was distinguished by the thanks of the Catholic body in the following note from their secretary:

“ TO THE REV. THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ SIR,

“ I am directed, by the Board of British Catholics to communicate to you their unanimous vote of thanks for your late valuable sermon, entitled, ‘ A Plea for the Catholic Claims,’ and I beg leave to add the particular pleasure and instruction which I individually derived from the perusal of so liberal and excellent a publication.

“ I have the honour to be, Sir, with the highest respect and consideration, your obedient servant,

“ EDWARD JERNINGHAM, Secretary.”

This liberality of sentiment in the author of the discourse was not of recent origin. In a sermon now before the writer, composed for the 5th of Nov. 1780,* and delivered at Worcester, when he was the minister of that congregation, the following passages occur :

* The year 1780 will be recollected by some, and is recorded in the annals of history, as the period when the prejudices of an ignorant and bigoted populace were raised against the Catholics ; and a mob, led on by the insane and infuriate zeal of Lord George Gordon, proceeded to destroy their chapels, and to other acts of violence and spoliation, till checked and suppressed by the interference of the magistracy and the soldiery.

“ While I thus openly avow the sentiments I entertain of the Popish religion, I must be equally free to declare, that it would give me great concern if I thought there were any in this assembly who would be more tender than myself to the persons of those who profess it, that would feel a more sincere concern for any losses or sufferings which they might sustain for their adherence to a religion, in my esteem, dangerous and absurd; or that would more earnestly wish them to enjoy all the liberties and privileges to which they are undoubtedly entitled, while they continue to act as good and peaceable members of the community.

“ The wisdom of the British legislature has lately thought fit to grant an indulgence to the Papists by mitigating the severity of the penal laws. I call it indulgence, not toleration, for it by no means deserves that name. There are still laws in force against them, much severer than any man of humanity would wish to see executed; and those penalties only have been repealed which were peculiarly oppressive and injurious, and which would have appeared with much greater propriety in the decrees of the Inquisition than in the code of British law.

“ I scruple not to brand the heavy penalties to which the Papists were exposed, antecedently to the late repeal of the penal laws, with the name of persecution; for I know no other definition of persecution, but that it is the unjust infliction of pains and penalties on a religious account.”

The following letter was addressed to Mr. Belsham in acknowledgment of the receipt of the “Plea for Catholic Claims:”

“St. James’s Square, Mar. 29 (1813).”

“DEAR SIR,

“I have to thank you for your very acceptable present and the very flattering terms in which you are kind enough to express yourself about my public conduct. Nothing can be more gratifying to the sincere friends of religious liberty than to see Unitarians writing in defence of Catholic rights, and Catholics urging the justice and policy of universal toleration. If it was possible to make politicians and churchmen act honestly and reasonably, some general law to repeal all penalties and disabilities whatever, on account of religion, would long since have been passed; but *eâ conditione vivitur*, that it is often necessary for the purpose of obtaining the practical end of such a repeal, to leave the principle on which these exclusive laws are founded, untouched, in the statute book. While, however, there is a single provision in any statute incompatible with the general principle of religious freedom, you may be sure to find, at least, a sincere opponent of it in,

“Sir, your obliged and humble servant,

“VASSALL HOLLAND.”

The application of the Catholics having been attended with success, the Unitarian Dissenters were encouraged to seek relief from the penalties to which those persons were liable, who denied the doctrine of the Trinity. A motion for this purpose was made by William Smith, Esq., on the 5th of May, when leave was obtained to bring in a bill to extend to Unitarians the full benefit of the Tolera-

tion Act. The one first proposed, owing to some technical informality, was rejected; but a new and amended bill was allowed to be introduced, was expedited through the necessary forms, and was passed by both houses in time to receive the Royal assent before the prorogation of parliament. In reference to these proceedings, Mr. Belsham says, in a letter to a friend, (May 24,) "I thought, and had great reason to think, that our Unitarian acts of parliament, brought in by Mr. Smith, would have passed without opposition. Mr. Smith told me he understood it would be so, and that the Archbishop had given him great encouragement to believe that the bishops would be friendly. I saw it in the Archbishop's own hand-writing. But we now understand that the right reverend and most reverend prelates have altered their minds. There was a synod lately held at Lambeth, at which no less than thirty bishops were present; and it seemed to be the prevailing opinion, that the bill was to be opposed. The Bishop of Norwich alone had the courage to say, that his word had been pledged to support it, and he would support it; but upon this, as upon other occasions, he stood alone. I am curious to know upon what grounds it can be opposed. If possible I will be present in the house. The discussion will do good. Opposition will promote the cause far better than if the bill passed sub silentio. It will excite attention to our principles, and attention will produce conviction."

On the passing of this bill, which met with little or no opposition in either house, Mr. Belsham

preached a thanksgiving sermon,* at Essex Street, July 25th, which was published by the Unitarian Book Society, as an expression of their approbation of the sentiments contained in it, and of their sense of the great utility which would ensue from its extended circulation.

Mr. Belsham also published, "An Address to the Inquirers after Christian Truth," in reply to certain extracts from Dr. Magee's book on Atonement and Sacrifice. This reply arose from an attempt of a religious tract society at Glasgow, on Trinitarian and Calvinistic principles, to bring into disrepute the "Improved Version of the New Testament," by publishing certain passages from Dr. Magee's work, as an exposure of the unwarrantable liberties taken by Unitarians with the sacred scriptures, and some critical remarks on their interpretation of particular passages.

Mr. Belsham did not think it necessary to enter the lists with Dr. Magee. He regarded the writings of this gentleman as far from being that able defence of his own tenets which called for particular notice or refutation. He contented himself with this short but very satisfactory reply to those insinuations and calumnies of his reverend antagonist, which the Glasgow society had adopted. So complete and humiliating an exposure of the misrepresentations of the author must have convinced the Glasgow society, if their minds were susceptible of any impressions of truth and candour, that they had rashly employed the unjustifiable

* This was done by other Dissenting ministers in various places.

weapons of a boastful champion, which could neither be used with advantage by himself, nor be wielded with any success by those who engaged in the contest in the like unfair and disgraceful manner.

After noticing the return of his birth-day, in his usual manner, Mr. Belsham goes on to observe,

“April 26th, Monday evening.—I have been brought low and God has helped me. He has been better to me than all my fears. I have been afraid in seasons of perplexity, and he hath directed my steps: I have been afraid of arduous duties, and he has enabled me to perform them: I have been afraid of difficulties, and he has carried me through them: I have been afraid of the consequences of steps that I have taken under an imperative sense of duty, and he has sustained me, when I have cast my care upon him: I have been afraid of pain and sickness, and he has wonderfully preserved me from extreme illness, and enabled me to bear the burden imposed. I was prepared for a life of privacy and retirement; I expected nothing of publicity; I aimed at no distinction; I never considered myself qualified for a public situation, but I have been placed in a conspicuous station, and have been enabled to fill it with some degree of comfort and credit, and I trust usefulness; and now, in the decline of life, beyond all expectation, and surely without any explicit effort on my part, a degree of popularity is attached to my public services which fills me with wonder. And blessed be God for numerous friends—kind, attentive, valuable friends. Some of the wisest and

best are now at rest from their labours. O may I be worthy to join their society again !

“ My time is almost passed and my work is not finished. I should be glad to have completed my Commentary on the Epistles, but this is almost laid aside. But, perhaps, ‘The Improved Version,’ which occupies my time, may be more useful. At any rate I would not be a slothful servant ; and I pray, that at what hour the Lord may come, he may find his aged servant at his post, either active in duty, or patient in suffering. I wait for thy salvation, O Lord.”

“ Dec. 6th, Monday evening.—I have this day been attending the remains of my old and worthy friend, the Rev. Samuel Palmer, of Hackney, to their last home. He died on Sunday, Nov. 28th, at four in the morning, after a short illness, a pleurisy, which did not begin to be serious till Friday morning, and he sunk under the letting of blood. He was an excellent man. I remember him as long as I remember any one ; and for upwards of forty years we have been intimate friends. He was always a man of great integrity and openness of character, occasionally jealous of rivals in the ministry, and discontented when any of his people left him ; but I have seen him behave with great firmness upon trying occasions, and under great pecuniary losses ; but these never interrupted his cheerfulness, and he was a man of unbounded liberality.

“ The deaths, which have taken place in the circle of my nearer connexions and contemporaries,

besides that above-mentioned, have been more than commonly numerous, interesting, and affecting. Among those which I have noted are the following: March 21st, Samuel Prime, Esq., of Whitton. In him I have lost an opulent and generous friend, whose purse was always open to the call of indigence, of religion, and of public spirit.

“Samuel Gaskell, Esq., of Warrington, at a very advanced age. He had been a great inquirer in theology, and the friend of the late Dr. Taylor, who often visited at his house, whose sentiments he formerly held, and was much concerned when his family became Unitarian.

“June.—The Rev. William Severn, of Hull, very suddenly. I knew him in Northamptonshire, highly orthodox, but of late he had become a zealous Unitarian.

“Aug. 9th.—The Rev. Joseph Bealey, of Cockey Moor. He wore himself out by his zeal and activity in his Master's service. The greater part of his life he was a zealous Arian, the intimate friend of Dr. Barnes. Since that gentleman's death he had studied the question. ‘The Calm Inquiry’ made an impression upon his mind. He met me at Warrington twice. In August 1812, he was very anxious to obtain satisfaction, and could talk of nothing but the subject of his inquiries. He was a calm, serious, devout inquirer, only solicitous to know the truth and to perform his duty. He soon afterwards became a decided and zealous Unitarian. Had Mr. Bealey lived we might have seen great things; ‘but we have this treasure in earthen vessels.’ And God will raise up competent instru-

ments to carry on his own cause, even when those are removed who, in human estimation, would be judged best qualified for the work. Farewell, my dear brother; may we meet again in better and happier regions, whence the cloud of error and vice is for ever banished, and the light of truth shall shine with undiminished, undecaying lustre!"

Mr. Belsham was again obliged to enter the field of controversy. After the death of Dr. Priestley and Mr. Lindsey, so many and repeated were the attacks upon the fair fame of these distinguished confessors, and upon the doctrines which they considered as the genuine truths of the gospel, even by the dignitaries of the Established Church, or those who were emulous of the honours such zeal might produce, that Mr. Belsham thought it necessary to stand forward in their defence.

At the close of the "Calm Inquiry into the Scripture Doctrine of the Person of Christ," the author had introduced a chapter, in which he reviewed the controversy between Dr. Horsley and Dr. Priestley respecting the existence of an orthodox Hebrew church at Ælia, the new name which Adrian had given to Jerusalem, or rather to a colony in its vicinity. . After having exposed the insufficiency of the evidence, Dr. Priestley concludes the discussion with this spirited challenge to the newly-created Bishop:* "Come forth, then, again, my Lord, and to all your powers of language be pleased to add those of argument. To use your own high Platonic language, Come forth with the full projection of your energies, and, if possible, overwhelm

* Dr. Horsley was then raised to the see of St. David's.

me at once.” Mr. Belsham adds, “To this animated challenge the right reverend adversary made no reply. The oracle was silent. The warfare was accomplished. The prize was won. And both the contending parties retired from the field equally well satisfied with the result of the conflict, Dr. Priestley with his VICTORY, and Dr. Horsley with his MITRE.”

The decision of the Reviewer “excited the attention, and moved the indignation of the Rev. Heneage Horsley, son of the late prelate, a prebendary of St. Asaph,” who made a violent attack upon Mr. Belsham, and not only controverted the truth of his assertion, but charged him with attempting to weaken the Bishop’s reasoning by making him occasionally say what he had not said, and quoting partially what he had said. In reply, Mr. Belsham supports Dr. Priestley’s argument, shews that he had not falsified history, defends the character of Origen, exposes the incorrectness of Mosheim, after whom Dr. Horsley had presumed to charge this venerable Father with uttering a falsehood, and concludes with asserting, that the late Bishop himself knew that Dr. Priestley had the advantage in the argument.

The impartial reader of this controversy will perceive how feebly the reverend prebendary defended his father’s cause, and with what success Mr. Belsham supported that of his respected friend. Whether or not Bishop Horsley was satisfied with his mitre, his calumniated and reviled antagonist had every reason to triumph in the palm he won, and nothing but prejudice and bigotry will ever

again attempt to tear the laurels from his brow. Mr. Belsham had the satisfaction to know that the well-meaning vindicator of a father's blighted fame was silenced, if not convinced, and so far acknowledged that the victory in this celebrated controversy was Dr. Priestley's.

There was, however, one person of great learning and high station who objected to the assumed result of this discussion. Bishop Burgess, the successor of Dr. Horsley in the see of St. David's, was highly offended that Mr. Belsham had said, "That he knew not that he should ever have published his thoughts on the subject, had it not been for the unblushing confidence of Bishop Horsley's partizans, in claiming for their chief that palm of victory *which he did not*, and which *he well knew he could not* claim for himself."—"In points at issue between him and the learned prelate, the victory of the great advocate of the Divine Unity was decisive and complete. *This the Bishop well knew.*" This zealous defender of his predecessor's dialectic fame endeavours to shew from some passages in Bishop Horsley's tracts, that he by no means conceded the victory to his adversary. Bishop Burgess was still more offended, "that, not content with the false assertion, that Bishop Horsley *knew* Dr. Priestley's victory to be decisive and complete," Mr. Belsham had added, "that the Bishop would have laughed at the 'ignoramus' who should seriously think that the advantage of the argument lay with him," and adduces two authorities "to confront the arrogance and injustice of this charge;" the one, that of Lord Thurlow, an

admirer of Bishop Horsley's writings, and who had raised him to the episcopal throne ; the other, of Mr. Whitaker, who, in the dedication of his work on the origin of Arianism to Bishop Horsley, had requested him to accept a copy of the same, in order to shew his Lordship and the world his strong sense of the service which he had done to the cause of Christianity by his late writings against a well-known heretic." Bishop Burgess adds, "Mr. Belsham calls Bishop Horsley a 'baffled and defeated antagonist,' and pronounces 'the victory of Dr. Priestley to be decisive and complete.' Mr. Belsham may say this, but he cannot believe it."

In reply to this unbecoming language, Mr. Belsham complains that the learned prelate had departed "from those forms of civility which the custom of polished life has rendered indispensable in the intercourses of society, and which ought by no means to be banished from theological discussions ;" and, after acknowledging that Dr. Priestley had not been successful in every point of this famous controversy, contends that, in the grand question at issue, the existence of an orthodox church at Ælia, his revered friend had completely succeeded in demolishing the very foundations of such a church, and that Bishop Horsley had, in fact, acknowledged that no such church ever existed. Mr. Belsham further states, that whatever might be Lord Thurlow's opinion of the Bishop's learning and eloquence, he did not mistake to which of the combatants the victory was to be assigned, and would not have awarded it to the Bishop. Of Mr. Whitaker's judgment he makes little account.

Adopting a mode of expression used by Dr. Horsley, in reference to the calumniated Origen, Mr. Belsham adds, "*We give his Lordship this Mr. Whitaker.*" *

The reward which awaited these efforts of Mr. Belsham in behalf of his friends was found in the consequence of these discussions. They decidedly assisted in diffusing the doctrines which these reverend and right reverend gentlemen attacked, and produced a more general acknowledgment of the fair character and distinguished abilities of those eminent advocates of the Unitarian scheme, Dr. Priestley and the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey. In this, as in other instances, calumny defeated its own purpose.

The following extract from Mr. Belsham's correspondence with his friend Mr. Broadbent contains an observation which is deserving of attention, and probably may induce some who fill important stations in Dissenting churches to adopt a practice which proved so truly beneficial, and which unquestionably was the source of the purest satisfaction and delight to the highly respectable individual to whom Mr. Belsham refers :

"I am very glad to hear that you have established a lecture for young people, and that it is so well attended. In this way I think a minister may be most useful ; and I confess I greatly prefer it to all missionary proceedings, though in some cases these are not without their use, in exciting attention to theological subjects ; but I do not as yet see that in

* This attack of Bishop Burgess's, with Mr. Belsham's reply, was first published in the Gentleman's Magazine, and afterwards in the Monthly Repository for 1814, Vol. IX. p. 602.

many cases they have done any permanent good. Our friend Mr. Kenrick never was a very popular man. He had a great dislike to illiterate preachers, and to every thing irregular and eccentric ; but of all Unitarian ministers he was most useful, by expounding the Scriptures regularly in public, and by delivering a systematic course of lectures to the young men of his congregation, who all grew up enlightened, confirmed, and zealous Unitarians, so that at the end of twenty years the spirit of the congregation was entirely changed."

On the anniversary of his birth-day Mr. Belsham observes,

"April 26.—How transient and fleeting a thing is human life ! How short the review of more than half a century ! How very few the months that remain ! The idea is continually present to my mind, and is one of the prevailing motives of my conduct.

"I am at the same time bound to acknowledge, that the latter years of life are to me beyond comparison the happiest. This phenomenon is singular, and perhaps the case may not be universal. I feel indeed declining strength, and occasionally perceive symptoms that alarm me much. I have lost almost all elasticity of body and mind. Every thing is now a labour, particularly all corporal exertion. The idea of using exercise for pleasure is completely lost. ' Lover and friend are put far from me, and my acquaintance into darkness.' The number of old friends is continually diminishing, and though I acquire new ones, who are very kind and good, they want what may be called the *raciness*

of the old. Yet I must say, upon this head, that I have had fewer old friends remaining than many others, as I was deserted by many, who were once most intimate, when I avowed my change of sentiments. But I do not mention this by way of complaint. God has been faithful to his promise. He has more than made up every loss of that kind—yes, more than a hundred fold. In addition to all this, death and the grave, and the fearful passage to both, are before me in very near prospect, hastening on, like one who travels, who, at a distance, hardly appears to move, but when he is near at hand advances with continually increasing speed. How then is it that I find myself happier now than in any former period of life?

“ In the 1st place, I enjoy remarkable health and freedom from all distressing pain. 2ndly, My circumstances are easy. I have a good income. 3rdly, The thought of dying, though the event is near and continually present to my mind, though it excites my desire of exertion, and makes me indifferent to many things which were once the object of desire, e. g. cultivating high and opulent connexions, &c., yet it does not excite any very painful feeling, nor in the least interfere with any innocent pleasure, such as social meetings, conversation, recreation, &c. 4thly, I am less affected by the loss of friends, because I expect soon to join them. 5thly, The passions, if not altogether eradicated, are more calm and quiet, more under discipline and control. 6thly, The great thing of all is the total and beneficial change in religious principles and views. In younger life, every thought of religion

was melancholy, every feeling painful. I shudder at the recollection of all that I once believed and felt. With my present views, no feeling is connected with religion but that of delight. God is a kind and wise father ; all his dispensations are gracious : even the discipline that he exercises is salutary and beneficial. Every thing is going on right, in the best manner, and in a constant, uninterrupted progress of improvement, of virtue, and of happiness. How delightful ! How gracious, how good is God ! How happy to live under the government of perfect Benevolence, of perfect Wisdom, of almighty Power ! 7thly, I find unspeakable satisfaction in being permitted to speak my sentiments with unbounded freedom, and to defend them as I think right ; and my hearers, so far from being offended, are pleased ; and the number increases. 8thly, I am constantly engaged in an employment which is to me very delightful, and which, in my judgment is of the highest importance, in teaching and defending the great truths of religion. 9thly, Though calumniated by bigots, it gives me no concern, and I am supported by friends whom I honour and love. 10thly, To have lived to see the great, and happy, and unexpected changes which have taken place in the political world, is a blessing which calls for the warmest gratitude ;—nor is it a little thing to see the Unitarian doctrine tolerated by law. 11thly, Though my prospects as to a future life are not unclouded, and I am at times more ready to indulge the fears of ——— than the calm and unhesitating confidence of Mr. Lindsey and Dr. Priestley, conscious indeed of so much that has

been, of so much that still continues, amiss in myself, and fearing, as I do, that it will hardly be permitted me, in another state, to enjoy the society of those whom I most loved and valued here ; yet upon the whole hope prevails. I cannot doubt the ultimate goodness of God, even to me, who am so unworthy of his mercy. When I think of all his past goodness,—of the wonderful and mysterious way by which he has led me,—of preventive and distinguishing benignity,—and of my present situation, views, and comforts,—how can I doubt his paternal goodness ! O my God, thou wilt not leave me, thou wilt not forsake me.”

‘ Prostrate my contrite heart I bend ;
My God, my Father, and my Friend,
Do not forsake me in the end.’

ROSCOMMON.

I should have mentioned among other sources of present gratification,—12thly, Pleasing recollections ; sensations of pain, which have gradually subsided into pleasure ; unpleasant, mortifying, painful scenes, through which I have passed, which I now look upon with pleasing sentiments ; friends that I have lost, whose recollected kindness is now a source of melancholy delight.”

Though Mr. Belsham had so completely exposed the inconclusive reasoning of his oponents, the unjust charges which were brought against him, and the calumnies which were so freely propagated by those who reviled the body of professed Christians to which he attached himself, he appears to have been considered as a fair mark for those who wished to distinguish themselves in theological war-

fare, and he had again to gird on his armour to withstand the attack of his former opponent, the Bishop of St. David's. This zealous advocate of intolerance and bigotry was not ashamed to express his regret, that the penal statutes against the impugners of the Trinity had been repealed, nor to contend that the old law ought to be renewed; and insinuated that the bill which relieved them from the penalties to which they were liable, had been artfully carried through the house. An account of this bill, and of its progress through both houses of Parliament, has already been submitted to the reader (p. 643); but in reply to the Bishop, Mr. Belsham gives a perspicuous and interesting history of the measure, which completely refutes the Bishop's statement, and exposes the singular narrowness and uncharitableness of his Lordship's mind. He further controverts and refutes his argument in support of his favourite doctrine of the Trinity, and fully justifies the appeal which Unitarians have made to the testimony of the Fathers, that Unitarianism was the prevalent doctrine among the lower classes of believers in the earliest ages of the Christian church.

This reply to the Bishop's intolerant pamphlet was published as an appendix to a sermon on the Progress of Intellectual, Moral, and Religious Improvement, during the present (now the late) Reign, preached at Essex-street Chapel, March 31, 1814. It is characterized by Mr. Belsham's energy, perspicuity, and simplicity of style, by manly firmness in the cause which he espouses, and by close and

convincing argumentation in defence of the doctrines and principles which he regards as Christian truth.

In the list of dignitaries who have libellously attacked the Unitarians, may be included the then Bishop of London, now the Archbishop of Canterbury, who, in a Charge delivered to the clergy of his diocese, at his first visitation, more than insinuated, that a great portion of professed Unitarians were infidels, and “that the charge of infidelity attached, in a certain degree, to all who refused their assent to any material doctrine deducible by the established laws of interpretation from the Scripture ;” which, of course, his Lordship considered the doctrine constituting the articles of his faith to be. Mr. Belsham immediately stepped forward to repel the charge, which he did in a series of Letters (1815) addressed to the right reverend Bishop, in which he gives a concise, but clear statement of the principles and faith of Unitarians, refutes the allegation, that Unitarians are in alliance with other sects to overthrow the established church, and asserts, that “half of the Unitarians approve of a civil establishment of religion, and would prefer a liturgy to other forms of prayer.” This Mr. Belsham might imagine, though it was not, and is not, the fact. He would most likely be led into this error by his connexion with many who, though they disapproved the doctrines of the established church, were yet attached to its forms of religious service. Mr. Belsham further vindicates the Unitarians from the charge of unbelief, by clearly stating what constitutes a be-

liever, viz. the acknowledgment that Jesus is a teacher sent from God, and that the denial of this proposition constitutes an unbeliever, between which there can be no degrees of infidelity. Mr. Belsham also declares his total ignorance that unbelievers are embodied with Unitarians; justly alleging, that they could find no advantage in such an union, the temptation being strongly in favour of an alliance with the established church, or a profession of it; and that, in fact, many who were regarded as avowed unbelievers, such as Bolingbroke and Gibbon, still professed themselves zealous churchmen.

How far the venerable Primate may regret that he ever advanced such charges against the Unitarians does not appear, but the advocates of the unity of the Divine Nature have reason to congratulate themselves that Mr. Belsham was induced to make this judicious and animated defence of their principles and of their faith.

In reviewing the year, after observing that the public events of it transcended every thing which history records, he adds,

“Dec. 31.—I cannot boast personally of having done much, either for my own improvement or that of others. But He that knows the willing heart will not cast me off when strength faileth. I have published Letters to the Bishop of London, in defence of Unitarianism, which have met with great acceptance. I have also written an answer to the Bishop of St. David’s invective, which I am now publishing. I wish it may not be thought intemperate—I have endeavoured to soften it; but I seemed to be called to write in self-defence. I have

not made many sermons, but, I bless God, both sermons and lectures are attended by increasing numbers, and I trust are of some use."

Among the number of deaths recorded by Mr. Belsham in the past year, is that of the Rev. Samuel Cary, aged 25, the colleague of Dr. Freeman, of Boston, in New England, of whom an interesting account, partly extracted from a sermon preached by Mr. Belsham, is given in the *Monthly Repository*, Vol. X. p. 729. Mr. Cary's remains were interred at Hackney, and Mr. Belsham performed the funeral service, at the last request of the deceased.

Among other opponents, Mr. Belsham had to encounter the Rev. Reginald Heber, at that time rector of Hodnet, in Shropshire, who had been appointed Bampton Lecturer at Oxford the preceding year. This learned divine was, after some years, created Bishop of Calcutta, in which office he displayed a truly Christian and catholic disposition, and by his unremitted exertions in the discharge of duty exposed himself to the diseases of the climate, and died after a short exercise of his episcopal functions. In the defence of the doctrines and tenets of his church, in the service to which he was appointed at Oxford, he manifested too much of the illiberal spirit of other controversialists, and did not scruple to insinuate, "that Mr. Belsham had afforded reason to apprehend that his private notions of Christianity were of a kind very faintly distinguished from Deism." To the Lecturer's statements and argumentation Mr. Belsham has made a short, but spirited and satisfactory reply in the

Monthly Repository, Vol. XI. p. 257, and availed himself of the opportunity of apologizing for an erroneous representation which he had been understood to have made of the late Bishop Shipley's sentiments concerning the person of Christ. Mr. Belsham had presumed, that the Bishop of St. Asaph, the friend of Mr. Lindsey and of Dr. Priestley, was a Unitarian. It appeared from the representation of Bishop Burgess that he was an Arian, similar in his principles to his learned friends, Dr. Price and Sir William Jones.

A more important work, published in this year, 1816, is a letter from Mr. Belsham to the Unitarian Christians of South Wales, occasioned by the animadversions of his old opponent, the right Reverend the Lord Bishop of St. David's, in commenting upon which the reviewer in the Monthly Repository has justly observed, "Mr. Belsham enters the arena with firm and intrepid step, maintains the conflict according to the rules of honourable warfare, detects and foils his antagonist whenever he takes up unlawful weapons, and retires when the contest is fairly ended, cheerfully awaiting the decision of the intelligent and learned public, the only proper judges, but expecting, not presumptuously nor unreasonably, that to him the palm will be awarded."

In this letter Mr. Belsham has again discussed the merits of the controversy between Bishop Horsley and Dr. Priestley, gives a concise summary of the argument of the learned prelate, and exposes the weakness of the foundation on which he rests his position.

Mr. Belsham further defends himself from the

charge of ingratitude and breach of confidence, in publishing the letters of the Bishops of Elphin and of Carlisle, the former of which appeared in the Memoir of Mr. Lindsey, for which Mr. Belsham had been severely censured by Dr. George Law, the then Bishop of Chester. These letters appeared in the Address to the Unitarian Christians of South Wales; and the re-publication of them, and of his defence, gave rise to the following correspondence:

The Right Reverend the BISHOP of CHESTER to
the Reverend THOMAS BELSHAM.

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ It would give me great concern to think that I had thrown out an undeserved censure upon you, or upon any one. That such, however, is *your* opinion of my observations to the Bishop of St. David's, is what I learn from your ‘Letter to the Unitarian Christians,’ which has just fallen into my hands. Now, after a very strict and impartial reconsideration of those observations, I must own that my sentiments concerning the publication of my brother's letter remain unaltered. I still think that the publishing it was an ‘act of ingratitude as well as a breach of confidence,’ for I do not see how the intervening death of my brother could make any difference whatever in the colour of that transaction. The Bishop had requested ‘that his name might on no account be mentioned to any one,’ and therefore his letter ought not to have been published, whether he were living or dead. For what was the Bishop of Elphin's *motive* for desiring that his letter might not be made known? Was it not to prevent

the possibility of its being supposed that he agreed with Dr. Priestley upon certain controverted points, because he had communicated to him pecuniary assistance? Unless, therefore, you hold that a man's character, after he is gone, be nothing, you must allow that the Bishop of Elphin's injunction ought to have been looked upon as equally sacred, and should have been as binding after his death, as it could have been considered during his life. Indeed, in my opinion, it was more so, because when living he could have defended himself.

“As the charge of ‘ingratitude’ rests upon the same ground with the other, it would be a waste of words to stop to prove the truth of the assertion.

“Having very little time, and still less inclination for controversy, I should not have troubled you with this letter, but from a wish to vindicate myself in your opinion, or at least to point out the light in which I had viewed the subject at issue between us. I certainly have risen from an impartial study of the Scriptures with a conviction, on one essential point, entirely contrary to your own. But I never on that account entertained the least unfriendly feeling towards you, or the less highly esteemed your talents, your learning, or sincerity. I would therefore submit it to your more mature consideration to determine whether a bishop be justly chargeable with ‘ultra-orthodoxy’ because he had declared his entire and honest belief in the pre-existence of our Lord and Saviour.

“I am, Rev. Sir, your faithful, humble servant,

“GEO. H. CHESTER.

“*Palace, Chester, Oct. 12, 1816.*”

To the Right Rev. the BISHOP of CHESTER.

“MY LORD,

“I regret exceedingly to learn, from the letter which I have this morning had the honour to receive from your Lordship, that my defence against the charge of ingratitude and breach of confidence, in publishing the late Bishop of Elphin’s letter to Mr. Lindsey, though many of my friends have expressed their satisfaction with it, has not proved satisfactory to your Lordship.

“That an act prompted by the most grateful feelings should be construed as an act of injustice, appears to me not a little extraordinary. It might be erroneous ; it might be improper ; it might even be unjustifiable ; but it is particularly unfortunate that it should be interpreted as ungrateful. I cannot but hope that my readers in general will view it in a different light from that in which it has the misfortune to appear to your Lordship.

“Had the late excellent Bishop of Elphin imposed a peremptory restriction upon his venerable correspondent, without assigning a motive for it ; and, much more, had he assigned the motive which your Lordship suggests ; and had he really considered it as disreputable to be thought a Unitarian, there would, indeed, have been some colour for the charge of an improper breach of confidence in publishing his letter. But the Bishop stated in the most explicit language his motive for the injunction, and that motive was widely different from the motive suggested by your Lordship. It was purely

personal, and entirely ceased at the demise of the Bishop. The publisher, therefore, conceived himself completely released from the obligation of the injunction, and as performing a meritorious act in publishing a transaction so highly honourable to the liberal and learned prelate, and which had so great a tendency to promote a spirit of conciliation and charity among persons of different religious parties and persuasions. Your Lordship will please to recollect, that the Bishop of Elphin's words are these : ' My name must on no account be mentioned to him, or to any one else, as it would involve me with some acquaintance here, and do me more mischief than you can imagine, and which I am sure you would not wish.' This, my Lord, is the sole reason which the Bishop of Elphin assigns for his injunction, and it was understood as alluding to the ill-treatment which he would have met with from some of his bigoted acquaintance in Ireland, if this act of generosity should be made public ; and it was upon this supposition that the letter was introduced into the ' CALM INQUIRY,'* with the following preamble : ' And now, that he is at rest beyond the reach of envy and calumny, from which neither exalted station nor exalted merit could have protected him, it may be permitted to mention, that by far the most liberal subscriber to this object was the late Right Reverend Dr. John Law, Bishop of Elphin.'

“ With regard to what your Lordship is pleased to suggest as what might probably be the operative

* Thus written in the copy before the present writer, but it should be into the *Memoir of Mr. Lindsey*, as appears p. 447 of that work.

motive with the Bishop of Elphin for introducing the injunction, I acknowledge that it never entered into my thoughts to suppose, either that the Bishop of Elphin would have been suspected of agreeing with Dr. Priestley in his speculative opinions, merely because he contributed to the publication of his works, or that he would have regarded such a suspicion as in any material degree disreputable. The opinions which Dr. Priestley professed are now unfortunately grown out of fashion. But there was a time when, though they were anathematized by ignorance and bigotry, they were not held in disrepute by the learned, and when a liberal interpretation of the articles was the fashion of the day. However, had I conceived that the motives which your Lordship suggests had been those of the Bishop of Elphin, I should certainly not have thought myself at liberty to publish his letter. But I flatter myself that, upon reconsideration, your Lordship will see that my view of the case is correct, and that the act of publication did not merit the rebuke which it unfortunately incurred.

“ I feel greatly obliged to your Lordship for the trouble which you have taken in explaining to me the ground of your censure, and it will give me great pleasure if any of the considerations which I have advanced contribute to mitigate its severity.

“ Of your Lordship’s impartiality in the study of the Scriptures, it is not for me to judge. Of your candour to those whose views of Scripture doctrine are different from your own, I could never entertain a doubt. And if I ever uttered or wrote a sentence, which could bear the interpretation, that ‘ a bishop

might be justly chargeable with ultra-orthodoxy, because he had declared his entire and honest belief in the pre-existence of our Lord and Saviour,' the thought of which, I believe, never entered my heart, I hereby retract and renounce it altogether, and remain, my Lord, with great respect, your Lordship's obedient servant,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.

“*Essex Street, Oct. 14, 1816.*”

To the Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM.

“REV. SIR,

“I am this day favoured with your letter, and am satisfied that you did not mean to be guilty either of ingratitude or a breach of confidence. I am, however, equally certain that the Bishop of Elphin's motives for wishing his kindness to Dr. Priestley not to be made known, were such, and such only, as I have stated. The charge of ‘ultra-orthodoxy’ was contained in the eleventh page of your publication—but you have said upon it all I could expect or wish for. I cannot close our correspondence without offering you my sincere good wishes ; and I am, Rev. Sir, your faithful, humble servant,

“GEO. H. CHESTER.

“*Palace, Chester, Oct. 19, 1816.*”

To the Right Rev. the BISHOP of CHESTER.

“Mr. Belsham feels himself under great obligation to the Lord Bishop of Chester, that his Lordship has had the goodness to afford him an opportunity to explain himself upon those points in which

Mr. Belsham unfortunately incurred his Lordship's censure.

“ Mr. Belsham is happy to find that his Lordship is satisfied, that if Mr. Belsham has acted erroneously, it was not with an evil intention. Mr. Belsham is obliged to his Lordship for so readily accepting the retraction of an inadvertent expression which had escaped him in his late publication.

“ Mr. Belsham begs leave to return the Bishop of Chester his best thanks for his Lordship's obliging expressions and good wishes, and begs permission in return to express his ardent desire, that his Lordship may long continue, in health and happiness, to adorn the dignified and important station in which Divine Providence has placed him in the Church, by his learning and his virtues.

“ *Essex Street, Oct. 23, 1816.*”

Mr. Belsham's remarks on his birth-day, in his diary of this year, indicate an increasing consciousness of bodily infirmity, and an apprehension that the close of life was much nearer than it proved to be. This constant anticipation of the rapid approach of the close of life is not an unusual nor unnatural feeling, and seems in a well-disciplined mind to excite to a prompt discharge of duty. It is thus Christianity teaches men to contemplate and improve the brevity and uncertainty of their earthly existence.

“ April 26.—I have now entered upon my sixty-seventh year. Since the last anniversary, my constitution has received a shock which plainly indicates that the tottering tabernacle is soon about to fall. My time is short ; my days are numbered ;

the sands are almost run out. It is now too late to do what has hitherto been left undone. My Practical Sermons, Devotional Lectures, and, above all, my Exposition of the Epistles, must remain as they are. And if, by those who come after me, they should be thought worthy of publication, they must be published without my last revisal. With regard to the latter, I wonder what I have been doing for the last ten years, that I have not corrected and got them forward. As far as I can judge, I might have done it ; but the hour is past.

“Death is a gloomy topic of contemplation ; but it is childish to indulge unreasonable fears of death. I quite agree with the author of the paper in the Mirror, that children ought never to be taught to fear death, but to regard it as the natural and necessary termination of present existence.—But will there be an hereafter ? and if there be, what will be its complexion ? With regard to the first, my faith is founded on the resurrection of Christ,—a fact of which we have the strongest historical evidence : but as to the second, I cannot answer it to my own mind with the satisfaction and confidence of a Lindsey or a Priestley. I am not without fears. But I thank God, I have no doubt as to the ultimate issue. It is the same God who governs the present and the future world ; and he that has been so kind to me in this probationary state of existence will not be less kind when I enter upon ‘the land unknown.’ I rejoice, therefore, with trembling ; yet still I rejoice, and will hope, and patiently wait to see the salvation of God.”

Writing to Mr. Broadbent on this day, Mr. Belsham says, "I may say with my friend Dr. Priestley, 'I have seen much of life,' in comparison at least with many of my brethren, 'and of the goodness of God in it.' You remember the time when I left Daventry! How little could I then foresee what has since happened! I expected nothing more than to pass the remainder of my days in obscurity and retirement; instead of which I have been placed upon a public theatre; and all the sacrifices which I made under a commanding sense of duty, have been compensated a hundred-fold. Indeed, I am sometimes amused to think of the consequence to which I have risen,—that any thing which my humble talents can produce should be thought worthy of being noticed by the great men of Oxford, Cambridge, and Dublin, not to mention my worthy antagonist Professor Kidd, of Aberdeen, and that men of first eminence in the Church should do me the honour to enter the lists with me! But with truth on my side, I set them all at defiance, and with the stone and the sling, I am not afraid to meet the proudest Goliath of them all: and I well know how to interpret all their expressions of contempt. 'I have fought the good fight, and am now finishing my course.' If my humble efforts are approved by the only competent and rightful Judge of the contest, I am quite satisfied. The sincere, however ineffectual, exertion shall not lose its reward; and we know in whom we believe, and are sure that He will keep the precious deposit until that day; and that, when our labours are over, a holy band of

worthy successors shall be raised up from generation to generation, to support the cause of truth and goodness to the end of time.

“I am glad you think I have not been more severe upon my right reverend antagonist (Bishop Burgess) than the case required. He may indeed well be ashamed of himself, as his friends, I believe, are ashamed for him. There is reason to believe that he has called, in that foolish book, ‘The Bible, and nothing but the Bible, the religion of the Church of England.’ There is not a copy to be had in London: and the Dean of Winchester, Dr. Rennell, who is the preacher at the Temple, when he wanted to read the book, could meet with no copy but mine, which I lent him for the purpose.

“You have no doubt seen the Quarterly Review. I am neither surprised nor concerned at the contempt with which I am treated in it. It only shews the weakness of their cause, which requires to be supported by misrepresentation and falsehood. One circumstance is remarkable, which shews how much the public attention is excited by the subject—the whole impression of that Review is already sold off.”

At the close of the year, Mr. Belsham records his grateful feelings:

“Tuesday evening, Dec. 31.—I began the year with considerable apprehension that I should not see the end of it. I am, however, through the good hand of God, brought to its close, in the possession of many enjoyments, of many invaluable privileges and blessings, though not without increasing and

alarming infirmities. But surely I have reason to acknowledge with gratitude, that the preponderance is greatly in favour of enjoyment.

“ I have noticed the decease of many friends and acquaintance, some very intimate, whose death was little expected, and others who were brought down to the grave in full age, as a shock of corn fully ripe.

“ January 16, or about that time, Mrs. Lewin, of Liverpool, my first cousin, an excellent, generous-spirited, sensible woman.

“ May 6, or thereabouts, Mrs. Priestley, wife of Joseph Priestley, Esq., an unspeakable and irreparable loss to her husband and family.

“ June 21, the Rev. Jeremiah Joyce, very suddenly. He was a most active and useful character. He had surmounted all difficulties, and attained a situation in which he was likely to live in affluence and credit, and to lay up a handsome provision for his family. But by an unsearchable dispensation of an unerring, but a mysterious Providence, ‘ the number of his days has been cut off in the midst, and his purposes have been broken off, even the thoughts of his heart.’

“ August 28, the Rev. William Vidler, a man of no education, but of strong powers, studious habits, great information, and an enlightened, intrepid, and eloquent advocate of evangelical truth.

“ October 8, Thomas Scott, Esq., aged ninety-four, long a member of the congregation at Essex Chapel, and formerly member of Parliament for Bridport. I attended his funeral with the Duke of

Sussex and other persons of rank and respectability, and preached a funeral sermon on the following Sunday.

“Nov. 23, the Rev. Benjamin Carpenter, my old friend, my contemporary at Daventry, with whom I have been on a footing of friendship for almost fifty years, though a little interrupted by public controversy. He was a very serious, good man.

“Dec. 26, Dr. Disney, in early life a zealous, able, and disinterested advocate of Christian truth.”

Dr. Magee, Dean of Cork, in a third volume of his theological works, attacked the editors of “The Improved Version of the New Testament” with great virulence, and endeavoured to represent them as attempting, in a clandestine and culpable manner, to alter the Primate’s text, which was the basis of their version. And the very reverend Dean enumerates, in an imposing and apparently formidable array, *six* passages in which the editors of the Improved Version are guilty of this flagrant offence, all of which, as he expresses it, “vitally affect some of the great doctrines of Christianity.” Mr. Belsham replied to this charge in the Monthly Repository, Vol. XII. pp. 81 and 145. The reader will be surprised, and perhaps amused, to find that *two* of these important passages are confessed by the very reverend Dean to be distinctly acknowledged deviations, though the confession was not made till he had indulged, if not exhausted, his invective against the editors for this flagrant breach of their engagement, which he asserted “could not have occurred by mere accident.” Of the other cases Mr.

Belsham has shewn, either that the alterations were of little consequence, or that the editors would be acquitted by every candid judge of any sinister intention or design, when the instances of *omitted* acknowledgment were so very few amidst so many hundred *marked* deviations from the Primate's text. Mr. Belsham justly retorts upon his reverend antagonist instances of his own misrepresentations of his (Mr. Belsham's) language, in which he was followed by his friend the Bishop of St. David's, as "an authority which he could infallibly trust."

In this year, 1817, Mr. Belsham published "A Plea for Infant Baptism," in a series of letters addressed to his friend the Rev. William Broadbent, which he thought a subject much misunderstood. The general evidence in favour of this practice is contained in the following letter to Dr. Carpenter, at that time minister of the congregation at Exeter, dated April 15, 1807, which shews that Mr. Belsham's opinion had long been settled on this important question :

"You ask my opinion concerning Infant Baptism. My judgment is very decided in favour of the baptism of infants; admitting, however, that much may be said in favour of proselyte baptism, but nothing for adult baptism.

"The subject, in my mind, lies in this form. Baptism in general is enjoined in the New Testament, without stating whether it was or was not to be applied to the descendants of believers, whether infant or adult.

"All baptisms in the New Testament are cases of proselytes and their households. Instances of

baptizing the descendants of believers hardly fall within the scope of the history.

“No controversy existed concerning baptism for two centuries and more, which would never have happened, if the apostles had prescribed one rule and the majority of Christians had adopted another. Witness the bitter controversies concerning Easter.

“Tertullian, about A. D. 200, first mentions infant baptism. He speaks of it incidentally as in general use, and advises that it should be deferred till children could speak.

“About seventy years afterwards, a council of bishops was held in Africa, I think at Carthage, to decide, not whether infants were to be baptized, but whether they were to be baptized before the eighth day.

“In the beginning of the fifth century, A. D. 410, the Pelagian controversy broke out. The Pelagians were charged with taking away the grounds of infant baptism. They warmly deny it. And Pelagius and Celestinus, men of great learning and research, declare, that they not only allow infant baptism, but that they never heard or read of any heretics so impious as to deny it.

“From hence I infer, that the baptism of the infant descendants of Christians is of apostolic institution, without which it would be impossible to account for the uniformity of the practice amongst Christians; and it is this uniform, undisputed practice which ascertains the extent of our Lord's precept.

“Some few instances of deferring the baptism of

the descendants of believers to adult age are mentioned in ecclesiastical history, and here the chief strength of the Baptists lies. The cases are enumerated by Wall and Gale.

“This, my dear Sir, is the brief state of the argument, which to my mind is quite satisfactory. The meaning of the rite is to express symbolically the faith of the parents, in very interesting circumstances, which naturally imply an obligation and intention to educate the child in the knowledge and practice of the Christian religion. It is usually a very interesting service.

“Proselyte Baptists have scripture precept, ambiguous ; scripture example, through necessity, not in their favour ; but uniform and universal ecclesiastical antiquity on their side, an undisputed agreement which, as I think, almost to demonstration proves apostolic warrant,—exactly similar, and, I may say, equal to that for the religious, not sabbatical observation of the Lord’s-day.

“Adult Baptists have neither scripture precept, nor scripture example, nor the practice of antiquity in their favour.”

The following extract is from a letter, dated Oct. 28, addressed to Dr. Carpenter, on his leaving Exeter :

“I take shame to myself that I have not written to you sooner to congratulate you upon your removal to Bristol, and to express my earnest wishes and prayers that you may long remain useful and happy in your new situation. I hear, indeed, that you have already done much to revive the congregation at Lewin’s Mead, and I hail it as a happy

omen of the revival of Christian knowledge and Christian practice in the members of that respectable society. I am told that you are about to give a course of lectures to your young people, and am glad to learn that many have given in their names to attend. This is a good sign. I have no great opinion of sudden conversions, nor have I any very high expectations from missionary preaching; nor any implicit confidence in missionary reports. The time is not yet come 'for a nation to be born in a day.' But where the well-informed pastor of a large congregation condescends to instruct the youth of his charge in the principles of moral and religious truth, and to go on from year to year, gradually enlarging their acquaintance with divine things, and assisting them to form connected and comprehensive views of Christian doctrine in its substantial evidence, its beautiful harmony, and its practical tendency, from labours so judiciously and perseveringly exerted, hardly any thing appears too much to expect. A seed-time so auspicious must issue in a copious harvest. Such has been the happy consequence at Exeter eminently, and at Birmingham, and a few other places. But this requires time, and pains, and patience, and does not suit the views and expectations of those who expect converts to fly as a cloud, and to make proselytes by hundreds, by preaching a few doctrinal discourses. It is pleasing to see young people eager to receive instruction. I wish ministers may be as well disposed to teach as others are to learn."

Mr. Belsham makes the following reflections on the return of his birth-day :

“April 26th.—I enter this day upon my sixty-eighth year. Thus is it that my frail existence is prolonged from year to year beyond the age of most of my friends and fathers of the preceding generation. And I continue to enjoy a considerable share of health, of ease, of cheerfulness, of freedom from anxiety and distress, and am, upon the whole, I think, in better health and spirits than I was last year.—I feel, however, the decay of nature; and the interval between the present hour and that of dissolution must necessarily be very short. I am ashamed to say, that I am intimidated at the prospect, and the reason is, that my life has hitherto been so free from disease and pain, that I tremble at the apprehension of suffering, and fear I shall not be able to endure the last struggle with that fortitude and resignation which would become my character and principles. I have always been prone to alarm and dejection when prospects have been dark and discouraging, but I have uniformly found that evil has either been prevented or mitigated, or if it has been suffered to overtake me, it has never been so insupportable in reality as it appeared in prospect. Why, then, do I hesitate to confide in that mercy and compassion which, hitherto, have never failed? O, my God, thou knowest the heart of thy servant, and thou wilt be better to him than his fears; and therefore, ‘though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.’ And in the mean time I will endeavour to bear with firmness the pain I feel; I will not indulge gloomy apprehensions of evils which may not be permitted to overtake me.

And knowing that my time is very short, I will endeavour to discharge remaining duties with diligence and steadiness to the best of my ability. O God, be merciful to thy servant, and remember not against me the frailties of my youth, nor the transgressions of riper years, but according to thy mercy remember thou me."

In this year Mr. Belsham published "Reflections on the Sudden Death of a Young Minister," the Rev. Thomas Biggin Broadbent, M. A. This was a very awful and affecting event, and is thus noticed by Mr. Belsham in his diary, in his general record of departed friends :

"The last year has conducted to their long home comparatively a small number of those with whom I have been long or much acquainted, the number of whom diminishes every year. Of those of whose departure I have taken notice in my diary, all but one were my juniors, and some of them my pupils. In the list of these is included, Nov. 9th, the Rev. Thomas Biggin Broadbent, who accompanied me on my way from Latchford* home as far as Daven-try, where I parted with him for the last time in health and spirits. This event was to me peculiarly melancholy, as I looked to him to revise, select, and publish my papers after my decease. I have no person to succeed him in this office ; and why should I complain ? If my papers are cast into the flames, the cause of truth will go on, though others are the honoured instruments of its success. But it will be remembered that I had it in my heart. The sermon which I preached and published on the

* Near Warrington, the residence of the Rev. W. Broadbent.

decease of this estimable young man makes it unnecessary for me to add more."

The following letter from Mr. Broadbent is a beautiful display of the influence of his religious principles, and is equally creditable to his parental feelings and to his Christian faith.

To the Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM.*

"Letchford, Nov. 17, 1817.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"I feel greatly obliged to you for your kind and consolatory letter, written immediately after you had received the melancholy tidings. It is, indeed, a severe stroke, if I could call any thing severe which God doeth: peculiarly severe as it regards my feelings, and all my views and hopes respecting this world. But these, perhaps, were wrong, and stood in need of correction, even those which regarded his service and instrumentality in the church of Christ. 'God seeth not as man seeth,' and he creates and qualifies such agents as he knows best fitted for the work he has to do, and whatever his service requires. We are gratified, and I hope not blameably, in being honoured as servants in such a cause. But if the service God requires be performed, and it most surely will, we ought, perhaps, to be satisfied. We have authority, indeed, for believing it is good that it was in our hearts, though the service is denied us. But I feel the strongest conviction that this event was appointed in infinite wisdom and benevolence, that it entered into the original

* Part of this letter was published by Mr. Belsham, and is inserted in the Monthly Repository, Vol XIII. p. 4.

plan of God, with all its circumstances, and that in the arrangement in which He has placed it, both the one and the other are to produce those consequences, immediately and remotely, which infinite wisdom and goodness hath intended. And the issue of God's government, I am sure, will be glorious and blessed beyond all the ideas I can entertain. And who am I, that I should deplore this or any other of the events of God's plan? The absence of any one may produce a derangement of more consequence and of greater extent than I can imagine. I know, that as it is, it is the plan of infinite wisdom to accomplish the purposes of infinite benevolence; and I am confident, that the distresses I feel have not in any degree exceeded what the benevolent and moral purposes of God required.

“In such reflections as these I have experienced invaluable consolation. I wish to bow, and I hope I do bow with dutiful and pious submission to the appointment of God. I am sure it is all right, all wise, all good. My faith, too, in the great doctrine of the resurrection is cloudless and strong, and greatly strengthens my consolation. For whatever defects in the proof some may imagine, they weigh as nothing with me, when I poise them with the evidence,—the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, so various, so consentaneous, so full and strong. That which you have touched upon in your summary, arising from the gifts of the spirit in the Asiatic churches, and which argument you extended in a late letter to me, has lately been much

upon my mind. It appears to me very forcible. It is very consolatory,

“But notwithstanding all these consolations, for which I thank God, I am sensible, from the frame of the human mind, that there are many associations that will still continue to suggest painful sensations till they are softened down by time, and new and different ones are formed. But this I doubt not is a wise and benevolent ordination. I see many kind alleviations upon which I reflect with gratitude.

“The event has made a very deep and feeling impression in Warrington and the neighbourhood, much greater than I had any idea of. At the interment, last Thursday, the chapel was quite filled, and there were many respectable people of all persuasions. Mr. Robberds, of Manchester, officiated. The service was very excellent and impressive. Several persons unknown to us came from Manchester, and several from Liverpool. Mr. Yates, of Liverpool, preached the funeral sermon yesterday afternoon. The chapel was crowded beyond whatever I saw it on any occasion before. It was a very impressive sermon and produced a great effect. Many of the more considerable persons in the town, of the establishment, were there. In hopes of hearing from you soon, I remain, my dear friend, yours most affectionately,

“WM. BROADBENT.”

The following extract from Mr. Belsham's diary is in the usual strain of his observations on the return of the day to which they refer, and though

little varied from some which have been already cited, they strongly mark the habitual piety and humble submission and resignation, which he was so desirous to cultivate and exercise.

“Sunday evening, April 26th.—I have this day entered upon my sixty-ninth year. It has been a day of much engagement and little retirement—but a season of much serious thought. My time of active service is now coming to an end, and my ability for labour is greatly on the decline, and yet I have much work before me, which, in all probability, I shall not live to finish. But what I am not permitted to accomplish will, I doubt not, be done in a far better way by other and abler hands. Blessed be God, who has so far honoured his unworthy servant as to employ him, in any degree, as an instrument to promote the cause of truth and virtue, and the best interests of mankind.

“My mind is full of busy and anxious thoughts as to what shall befall me in the short period which remains before me, and in what manner my existence here will terminate. And when I reflect on past life, I am not without gloomy apprehensions with regard to futurity. I cannot feel that confidence in the safety of my state which others have done, and with great reason; but I trust that in the end all will be well, and that in the midst of judgment God will remember mercy.

“While life, and health, and ability for labour, are continued, I hope to persevere in my application to the task immediately before me, the preparation of my Exposition of the Epistles, which, after all, I fear, will not answer the expectations of my friends.

But I will do my best ; the event I leave to Him that ordereth all things well.”

Mr. Belsham’s sentiments on a subject now in agitation are thus expressed in a letter to his friend, Mr. Broadbent :

“ May 21st, 1818.—I am not without hope of seeing my friends, Dr. Holme and Dr. Henry, in London. Their evidence is wanted in the case of the bill for limiting the time in which children shall work in the cotton factories. I think that a morbid spirit of philanthropy is abroad, and that our legislature, with very good intentions, but with very injudicious measures, are interfering where they can do no good. All governors are fond of governing too much, and the result of their injudicious benevolence will be, that hundreds and thousands of children, who maintained themselves very comfortably, and sometimes even contributed to maintain their parents by the labour of their hands, will now be turned adrift, to live in idleness and rags upon a parish allowance. The good people, however, have been disappointed with regard to climbing-boys, about which much foolish nonsense has been prated. But it appeared in evidence, that if the climbing-boys were put down the rate of insurance would immediately be raised,—that if chimneys are swept by means of machines, it will be necessary to send climbing-boys up to repair the mischief which the machines will do ; besides, that one fourth of the chimneys in town are incapable of being swept by any machine. I think it is equally foolish to interfere with the cotton manufactory. Where the masters are humane and virtuous they will treat the

children well; but where the masters are cruel and unprincipled, the children will be treated with cruelty and injustice, let government do what they will; and the more government interferes the worse it will be for the children, for the manufacturers, and for the country.”

Towards the close of this letter, referring to the death of his young friend, Mr. Belsham says, “I am much obliged to you and Mrs. Broadbent for your kind invitation to Warrington. My principal objection, as usual, is the distance. With regard to any other consideration I feel myself too near the borders of ‘the land unknown’ to be overcome by any undue feeling with regard to those, whether young or old, who have reached the end of their journey a little before me; and I think that you and I might talk upon such subjects without any unbecoming interruption of that even tenor of mind which they possess, ‘who sorrow not as others, who have no hope.’”

The following passage from another letter to the same friend, dated June 17th, contains Mr. Belsham’s review of some important scenes in his own life, and his judgment upon them.

“I had a letter the other day from our friend Mr. Bowden. He writes in good spirits. He says he enjoys very good health, and does not at all repent of having resigned the charge of the congregation. He makes rather an interesting comparison of his life and mine. We set out almost at the same time, in pretty nearly the same circumstances. But to be sure our course has been very different. I once had a very pressing invitation from Mr. Bowden’s

congregation, and was very warmly urged by the then minister, old Mr. Whitaker, to accept of it. I thank God, my mind was otherwise inclined. I was then a tutor at Daventry, and was fond of my situation. Providence, in its wisdom and goodness, has been pleased to conduct me in the best way. I sometimes shudder to think how near I have sometimes been to making a wrong choice and blasting all my future prospects. I tremble when I recollect that when I lived at Worcester and was invited to remove to Daventry, I was just upon the brink of declining the invitation, and fixing myself in that wretched place, in which I should probably have remained to the end of my days, without making a single advance in knowledge or usefulness. When I left Daventry I was very near rejecting, indeed I did again and again reject, the application from Hackney; but if I had not at last accepted it, though it proved a scene of great trial and misery, I should never have been where I now am. There was a time, when the affairs of the College were desperate, and every door in this neighbourhood appeared to be barred against me. Soon after this Dr. Priestley went abroad, and I received an unanimous application to succeed him in the congregation at Hackney, and from that time, 1794, every thing has been comparatively sunshine, and I thank God that I am now settled in a situation which, when I set out in life, I could never have hoped for, or believed, if it had been foretold by an angel from heaven. I can only say, and with gratitude do I acknowledge it, ‘He has led me by the right way.’”

In this year Mr. Belsham published two sermons: one on the state of religious parties in England, in which he gives a correct and discriminating account of the tenets of the respective sects which he describes, and concludes with such reflections as might be expected from a writer of his intelligence and liberality; the other, on the lamented death of Sir Samuel Romilly, whom he justly eulogizes for his professional knowledge and abilities, his love of freedom and devotedness to its interests, and his patriotism. Mr. Belsham intended, at first, to take only cursory notice of this melancholy event, in the service of the Sunday; but it so much occupied his thoughts, that at length he composed his sermon directly in reference to it. This discourse he presented to many of his own friends and those of the regretted subject of it, from whom he received polite acknowledgments of his attention. The following is from the pen of the distinguished and learned rector of Hatton:—

“DEAR AND MUCH-RESPECTED MR. BELSHAM,

“You know how painful it is for me to write at all, how impossible it is for me to write intelligibly, and how difficult it is for me to procure the aid of scribes. I will not, however, delay any longer my respectful and thankful acknowledgment for the sermon that you did me the honour of presenting to me. No subject can be more interesting, or I should rather say more afflictive to the mind. You, with judgment almost unparalleled, have surmounted the peculiar obstacles which crowded around your subject; you have done ample justice

to the intellectual and moral excellency of one whom I regarded with affection more than brotherly ; you have soothed my troubled spirit, and you are entitled to the praise of sensibility, discernment, eloquence, and genuine piety, from every reflecting and serious religionist. May Heaven bless you. I have the honour to be, with great and unfeigned respect,

“ Dear Sir, your Friend and obedient Servant,
“ S. PARR.

“ *February, 13th, 1819.*”

Mr. Belsham was frequently reproached for using the term Unitarian in too restricted a sense. It has already been seen on what grounds he justified the limited application of the term to those professed Christians who acknowledge the sole dominion of the One living and true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and exclude any other being from any participation in the creation or government of the world, or of the Divine nature and attributes. He, however, allowed others to use the term in their own sense, and only contended for the liberty of applying it in that which appeared to him the most proper and consistent. His friend Mr. Broadbent had objected to Mr. Belsham's allowing it was “a trifling matter” whether Arians were called Unitarians or not. To which he replies, “I think you express yourself a little too strongly, when you say, that I speak of Arians taking the name of Unitarians as ‘a trifling matter.’ All I mean to say is, that if they choose to assume the title, I have no right to forbid it : but, that it is a

title which I can never give them, and which they who believe in the proper humanity of Jesus Christ ought never to apply to them. For I contend, that Arians are essentially and necessarily idolaters; unless religious worship is made to consist in mere lip service; for it is quite impossible seriously to believe, that Jesus Christ is my maker, preserver, supporter, and benefactor; that in him I live and move and exist; that I derive every blessing immediately from his hand, and that it is in his power to preserve me from all evil, and to make me happy both here and hereafter, and that he is always present with me; that he hears every word, and is witness to every thought, and that he came down from heaven to suffer and die for me—it is impossible seriously and practically to believe all this, and frequently to meditate upon it, and not to feel those emotions of adoration, homage, gratitude, confidence, hope, and desire, which constitute the essence of religious worship, and which will naturally and necessarily, as they ought to do, express themselves in the language of devotion. Will any one tell me that it is irrational and criminal for me to ask a favour of a friend that is present with me, and both able and willing to do for me the kindness that I seek, or to guard me from the evil that I fear? I have lately been reading some of Mr. Orton's letters. He was a decided Arian; and he always recommends to his correspondent to apply to Jesus himself, and to cast the care of his soul explicitly upon him. So Mr. Grove, who was also an Arian, in his sacramental meditations: 'Do not I love thee, O my Saviour? thou knowest all things,

thou knowest that I love thee.' 'I love thee, O Jesus, but not as I would, not as I ought to love thee.' And I am sure, that when I was myself an Arian, in the sense of Dr. Clarke, for I never descended lower than that, I continually used and was delighted with those addresses to Christ, which are to be found in Dr. Watts's and Dr. Doddridge's hymns:—

Do not I love thee, O my Lord?

Then let me nothing love;

Be dead my heart to every joy,

If Jesus cannot move.

And again:

A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,

On thy kind arms I fall,

Be thou my strength and righteousness,

My Jesus, and my all.

“If this is not worship it is hard to say what is; and if Arianism is true, it would be impossible to prove that such worship was not due to Christ.

“Besides, if God is the only object of prayer, upon the Arian system, while Christ is the only agent, in what way ought our prayers to be addressed to him. It would be absurd to say to the Father, ‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ for that is the province of the Son. Our prayers ought be, ‘Direct thy Son to give us our daily bread; dispose him to forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and incline him to keep us from temptation and to deliver us from evil:’ so that the whole construction of our prayers ought to be changed, if Christ is the only agent in the universe; and yet our prayers are to be addressed to God. They who maintain, that Christ is the maker, supporter, and

governor of the world, and of all things in it, and yet is not the object of prayer, talk without considering at all the meaning of prayer, or the necessary and important consequences of their own shocking and unscriptural system.”

In a subsequent letter to the same correspondent, he adds,

“ I confess I am more and more of opinion, that high Arians are utterly unworthy of the name of Unitarians, or rather—for it is not worth while to quarrel about names—it is impossible that they should act in concert with those who maintain the proper humanity of Christ, in promulgating the truth of the gospel. And I feel the utmost confidence, that if an error so glaring had existed in the days of Paul, he would have entered his strongest protest against it. That any being, but the great Supreme, and, particularly, that the humble prophet of Nazareth should be the maker and preserver of all things in heaven and earth, is a doctrine which must have shocked the apostles beyond measure; and I can hardly think that they would have regarded any persons as Christians who could hold a doctrine so diametrically opposite to reason, and to the first principle, both of the Jewish and the Christian revelation. It is nothing but our having been used to hear it from childhood, and our consequent familiarity with it, that prevents us from being shocked at the very thought of it.”

Mr. Belsham closes the year with his accustomed grateful acknowledgment of the Divine goodness.

“ Thursday, Dec. 31st.—Thanks be to God, I am brought to the close of another year, and what is

most surprising and affords the greatest reason for joy and gratitude, I feel myself in a better state of health than I have enjoyed for two years past. Through the whole year I have been gradually recovering, and I can hardly recollect the time when my bodily health was better than it is at present. I feel that I am gradually becoming weaker and weaker, but thanks be unto God, I am at present going very gently down hill. And I would willingly hope, that the same kind, indulgent Friend, who has preserved me, during the course of a long life, from wearisome sickness, and from all extreme pain, will grant me, in the end, an easy and a short dismissal. But I confess that my fears sometimes prevail over my hope. I will, however, confide in his mercy, that he will enable me to bear with Christian fortitude whatever his providence, all-wise and good, shall appoint; and that He will not, in my last hour, suffer me to disgrace my profession, or to fall from Him."

Mr. Belsham's diary, in the year 1819, opens with remarks and observations, and with expressions of piety and humble resignation in scenes of trial and affliction, which make the following extracts too important and interesting to be suppressed.

"I have just entered upon a new year, and who can foresee the events which will take place in it? But why should I indulge unreasonable anxiety? The world is under the same wise and good government that it has always been;—I am myself the object of the same paternal care. I cannot call to mind the great goodness of God to me in past years of life, without astonishment and gratitude. I set out in life with many fears and discouragements; but

they are all vanished, and Providence hath assigned to me a lot, which if it had been foretold I could never have believed. I set out with fears that my ministry would find little acceptance, and that I should with difficulty find a maintenance, and there have been times when these fears seemed just about to be realized. But in the mount of danger the Lord hath appeared, and surprising deliverance hath been granted. And now I am in a situation—O how far beyond my most sanguine expectations! Possessed of what I may call affluence;—and what is most surprising, and what I sometimes can hardly forbear smiling at when I think of it,—in my advanced life I am become even popular as a preacher; an object of which I never dreamed, and at which I never aimed. But what I am most thankful for is, that God hath been pleased to purge away the scales of error and prejudice, and to lead me into the light of evangelical truth. What an inexhaustible source of vigour and comfort has this been! Alas! how was the cheerful season of youth chilled and depressed by the gloomy doctrine of Calvin! But the snare is broken, and I have escaped. And all my religious views and feelings are now of the most sublime and delightful kind.

“If life and health be continued, I foresee nothing that will interfere with my progress in the Exposition of the Epistles, to which I hope to proceed as soon as I have finished the works in the press.”

“Sunday evening, Jan. 10th.—Yesterday morning I received a letter from Mr. Samuel Kenrick, containing the afflicting intelligence of the death of my sister Kenrick. She has been declining for

some weeks past, but it was not apprehended that she was so near her end. On Wednesday morning, the 6th of January, she was easy and comfortable; in the evening a great change took place; she became restless, and was in pain, which continued till Thursday evening, at nine o'clock, when she became quiet and easy, and continued in that state till nine o'clock on Friday morning, when she expired so gently, that those about her hardly knew when she ceased to breathe. Her birth-day was in December, when I think she finished her 74th year.* Her life has been exemplary, and her death was peace. She resided under my roof the whole time that I lived at Daventry, from 1781 to 1789, and again at Hackney, from 1791 to 1794; in the spring of which year she married Mr. Kenrick, of Exeter. I always found her a kind friend, a prudent housekeeper, and when I had need of it, a tender nurse. By her cheerful and lively conversation and her good humour she was the idol of the students, and I never had any complaint while she kept house for me. Since she was married I have seen her only occasionally. She lived till life became almost a burden, being entirely deprived of sight, and almost of hearing; but she was commonly cheerful, and at all times expressed the most entire confidence in the goodness of God. Farewell, my dear sister. It will not be long before I shall follow you to the land of darkness and

* This is a mistake of Mr. Belsham's. It appears from a register of the birth of all his children, in the Rev. James Belsham's writing, that Elizabeth was born Nov. 26th, 1743, O. S., Dec. 7th, N. S., consequently, aged 75.

silence—and because God is infinite in mercy, I humbly hope, that I shall myself be admitted to a joyful re-union with you, in a new and better state of being, in which I doubt not that you will find a place, and where, I trust, that we shall meet again, free from frailty, imperfection, and sin; and be happy in the love and service of God, and in the society of all the wise and good for ever and ever, Amen.”

The more the mind is enlightened and purified by just views of religion, the more will it regret any remaining symptom or expression of that spirit of party which creates hostility amongst the professed followers of the same Master. And certainly the blame of keeping up this antichristian feeling does not belong to those who adopt more liberal sentiments and act upon them. Their co-operation is often rejected where they are anxious to unite with others in doing good, and they are obliged to pursue the object which they have in view by those means which their deliberate judgment approves, without the aid of their brethren, when a more enlightened policy, and a better feeling amongst their fellow-Dissenters, would produce a cordial union in pursuing the rights which almost equally affect all parties, the rights of religious liberty—without let or penalty to worship God, according to their convictions of the nature of that service which will be acceptable to him. In support of these views, the following extract is made from a letter to Dr. Carpenter, dated Jan. 29th :

“ I understood that you were expected in town last week at the formation of a society to protect the civil rights of the Unitarians. I did not attend,

because I have found it necessary to retire from all public meetings, but chiefly because I demur to the prudence and propriety of the Unitarians separating themselves from the rest of the Nonconformists, and establishing themselves as a distinct sect. This sectarian spirit, however it may tend to strengthen a party, appears to me to be unfriendly to the spirit of religion and the investigation of truth. Every sect must have its shibboleth. You must be tender to the errors of those who belong to your party, however gross or important, lest you weaken your interest. Whereas, religion is wholly a personal thing: and the investigation of truth requires unlimited freedom from restraint. I oppose error as such, without at all inquiring whether it will give offence to A or B, who may agree with me on other and more important points. I sometimes suspect that the cause was advancing more steadily when it advanced more silently, and that many are bawlers for a speculative system, who are strangers to the religion of the heart. We are ‘the salt of the earth:’ unless we mix with others we lose our value, and are of no use. ‘The kingdom of God cometh not by observation:’ the progress of truth is like that of leaven in meal, or the growth of a vegetable, imperceptible but real. Upon the whole, my judgment is, that we should form no permanent body, no separate, unconnected sect, but only associate for occasional purposes, and then disband.”

Mr. Belsham’s reflections on his birth-day are such as might be expected from him on attaining the age of three-score and ten.

“Monday, April 26th.—Good God, what a dream is human life! I can hardly believe I am now passing my seventieth birth-day, so short does the period seem since I passed my sixtieth, my fiftieth, my thirtieth, aye, my twentieth anniversary. ‘The days of my years are three-score and ten.’ What am I better than my fathers? and yet I have outlived the age of many whom I once thought old. I am older than Dr. Doddridge almost by twenty years. I am more advanced in age than Mr. Orton, than Dr. Ashworth, than Mr. Pickering, than my own father, than Dr. Price; and I have almost reached the age of Mr. Farmer, of Mr. Robins, of Mr. Palmer, of Dr. Priestley, and of Dr. Kippis; of those to whom, in my youth, I was accustomed to look up, as my fathers, my counsellors, my patrons: and in later years, as my wise and experienced friends.

“And what is most surprising, and calls for the warmest gratitude and thankfulness, I have enjoyed such uninterrupted health, such almost entire freedom from painful disease, from bodily accident, from excruciating suffering, such a wonderful share of ease, and vigour, and comfort of every kind, as falls to the lot of very few. O God, why have I been singled out for such distinguished favour? What have I done to merit this distinction?—to me so peculiarly welcome, who feel such a dread of pain, a feeling, no doubt, generated, in some measure, by my happy ignorance of it. But thou knowest my frame, and thou hast laid upon thy servant no more than he was able to bear. Not unto me, not unto me, O Lord, the most unworthy of thy creatures,

but to thy great name be the praise. Thou hast done thus for thy great mercy's sake.—My bodily strength and vigour are, indeed, greatly diminished; my health is liable to frequent interruptions; but, upon the whole, amidst the infirmities of age I feel great reason for thankfulness. Indeed, I once little thought that, at the age of three-score and ten, there could possibly remain so much enjoyment of life. I even doubt whether the last ten years have not been the happiest decade in my existence. My hearing is imperfect, my memory fails, and my sight was always bad, but I thank God that I do not find it materially grows worse. And though health has been interrupted, my complaints have not been painful, and I have been remarkably restored, so that for the last six months, with a great diminution of strength, I have enjoyed as much of the feeling of health as I have ever done, and my descent into the vale of years has been smooth and gradual.

“ My capacity for the duties of my office, composing, preaching, lecturing, publishing, has been graciously continued; and what to me is always a subject of astonishment when I reflect upon it is, that my popularity, if I may so express it, appears to increase with my years; and though many of my early friends have withdrawn one after another, yet some even of these are continued, and God has raised up others in the place of those who have been removed, and I bless God that I am capable of enjoying their society. I am likewise amply supplied with the necessaries and comforts of life to a degree far beyond any thing I had reason to expect, so that

I am in no want of those indulgences which are necessary to the comfort of declining life. I have occasionally enjoyed the consolations of devotion, of humble trust, of pious resignation,—and upon the whole, my state of mind has been, not indeed what it ought to be, O very far from it, but more tranquil than it has formerly been; and in the good principles which, blessed be God, I have been led to form, I have been more and more confirmed, and they have been the daily solace of my mind.

“These have been my enjoyments, my privileges. These comforts I even now possess, while others, and many younger than I, have been partly or wholly laid aside, or have been visited with acute or chronic diseases, or with racking pains; and who, O my soul, hath caused thee to differ, and to enjoy blessings so much superior to others, many of whom are much thy superiors in talent, in attainments, in zeal, in merit, in piety, in usefulness?

“And what are now my prospects? The thread of life is nearly spun, and the season of usefulness, of active service, may be more contracted still.—In the mean time, let me improve the few remaining hours of life and capacity. Let not the short remainder of time be misemployed. Let me finish, as well as I am able, my Exposition of the Scriptures; and let me preach, and pray, and lecture, and live as one who is in a short time to put off this tabernacle. And while thus employed, let me cast all my care upon him who careth for me. ‘Father, not as I will, but as thou wilt;’ let me be safe at last; as to the rest, ‘thy will be done.’”

Early in this year Mr. Belsham published a

pamphlet entitled, "The Bampton Lecturer Reproved, being a Reply to the Calumnious Charges of the Rev. C. A. Moysey, D. D., &c., in his late Bampton Lectures, against the Unitarians, and especially the Editors of the Improved Version; in Letters to a Friend. To which is annexed, a Letter in Reply to the Charges of the Very Reverend Dean Magee, in Vol. I. Part I. of his Dissertations on Atonement and Sacrifice." *

Dr. Moysey, like other opponents of Unitarianism, is unsparing of his censures of 'the Improved Version,' and as unguarded as virulent in his charges against the editors; but to these Mr. Belsham replies with the calmness and dignity of one who is conscious that he stands upon firm ground, and that the attack of his adversary may be repelled, not only without difficulty or hazard, but so completely and effectually as that his own weapons will be turned against him.

Dr. Moysey's creed, and his explanation and defence of it, meet with no quarter from his vigilant and well-armed antagonist, who is indeed so much better prepared to enter the lists, and so much abler in fight than his rash and violent assailant, that the easy conquest of the victor would add nothing to

* Of this work, when writing some time before to one of his friends, Mr. Belsham says, "The last preacher of the Bampton Lecture, Dr. Moysey, of Bath, has attacked me and the Improved Version with great virulence; I have been desired to reply, and I think I shall do it, and chiefly because it will give me an opportunity of republishing those letters in reply to Dr. Magee's Appendix which have been published in the Repository. It is upon Dr. Magee's infamous charges that Dr. Moysey founds his observations, for he knows very little himself."

his fame, if it did not manifest his competency to engage with a more powerful foe, secure, in the temper of his weapons, and in the skill with which he wields them, of that victory which always attends the able advocate whose vantage-ground is the rock of truth.

Truth and not victory was the great object of Mr. Belsham's anxiety. Whether it resulted from his own private study, and patient and laborious investigation, or was made known to him by the conclusive reasoning and irrefragable arguments of others in controversy, he would have hailed it with inexpressible satisfaction and delight, and would have felt himself indebted to the individual whose superior discernment or more successful researches had laid him under the obligation.

It was not often that Mr. Belsham adverted to public events, when writing to his friends; but that to which he alludes in the following extract from a letter dated Nov. 22nd, was of a nature to call forth his animadversion and censure: and time, which is the test of all things, has already confirmed, and will more decidedly confirm, the opinion which he has given of it:

“ You may easily suppose that the massacre of Manchester (for so I shall always call it) engrossed much of our conversation, and upon this subject there appears to be but one opinion. The party I met at Easton Gray* were universally against popular meetings, and were advocates for a very moderate reform of parliament. But that a peace-

* The residence of his friend, Thomas Smith, Esq.

able meeting of the people should have been dispersed by military execution was a topic of universal execration. How is it possible, that the grand jury, with Lord Stanley, a professed Whig, at their head, should have thrown out the bills which were brought against the Manchester Yeomanry ! And the conduct of the magistrates and of the coroner, in refusing to listen to evidence, is scandalous in the extreme. What must the people do, if they find no protection from the laws, and if the men whose duty it is to administer justice, will not attend to the clearest evidence ? I see no alternative but the desperate one of taking the law into their own hands, and that would be of all things the most horrible.”

In a letter to another friend, who was at that time in Germany, he says, “In England the public attention has been greatly occupied with the Manchester massacre, of which I am not a little surprised that the good princess Elizabeth should have expressed her approbation. Parliament meets to-morrow, and it is expected that Government will carry every thing with a high hand. In truth, our great men are willing to be slaves themselves, if they can but prevent the people from being free ; and this seems to be the spirit which now pervades the governments of Europe. But they cannot stop the progress of knowledge.”

The letter from which the following extract is taken was addressed to a young and highly-respected friend, who was pursuing his studies at Göttingen, and attending the most eminent professors of

the University. The following passage contains Mr. Belsham's opinion of German theology, and of its professors :

“ I am very much interested in the account you send of the lectures upon which you have attended. I love the critical, and I abhor the theological works of the German writers. I am astonished that the absurd hypothesis of anti-supernaturalism should have prevailed to such a degree. Is it possible that those who hold such opinions should be serious? Must they not certainly know, that to deny the miracles of Christ is to deny his divine mission, which is itself a miracle ; and that, in fact, it is downright infidelity? Is it possible that a man of understanding can be satisfied with explaining the miracle of stilling the tempest by composing quarrels between the boatmen and the disciples ; or the death of Ananias, by supposing that Peter was in a passion, and stabbed him ; or that Ananias, terrified by Peter's threat, fell down in a swoon and was buried alive ; or, that our Lord's ascension was nothing more than his running down the opposite side of the hill during a thick fog, while two of his confederates, dressed in white for the purpose, amused the apostles by telling them that he had ascended into heaven, though in truth he was only gone off to Damascus, where he was alive and well, and master of a numerous and reputable school at the time of Paul's conversion? Such fictions as these are so gross an insult upon the understanding, that I do not wonder Paulus* is unwilling to finish his Exposition, and that Ammon* has changed his

* German Professors.

mind. To call such interpreters of Scripture believers in Christianity is an abuse of language. They are dishonest infidels. Like Hume, they deny the possibility of miracles, but they do not, like Hume, honestly declare their disbelief of the Christian religion; which, however, they must know that it is impossible they should believe.

“ I know but two persons in this country who are disciples of the German theology. And it is remarkable that no individual has ever undertaken the public defence of the cause of anti-supernaturalism in this country, and I am confident that, if it was ever broached, it could not stand for an hour against the argument and the ridicule which would be poured upon it.

“ But I love German criticism as much as I dislike German theology, and would give a great deal to be able to read or to hear Eichorn’s* lectures upon the Old and New Testament. I think that the origin of the four Evangelists is a very great difficulty. If the four histories existed in their present form, in the time of Justin Martyr, it is most unaccountable that he should never quote them by name; but at the time when he cites their very words, that he should only call them the *απομνημονευμενα*, the memoir of the Apostles, without ever mentioning the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.† Tatian, I believe, is the first who men-

* A German Professor.

† The passage in Justin Martyr to which Mr. Belsham refers is the following :

Οἱ γὰρ ἀπόστολοι ἐν τοῖς γενομένοις ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἀπομνημονεύμασιν, ἃ καλεῖται εὐαγγέλια, αὐτῶς παρέδωκαν, ἐντετάλλαι αὐτοῖς τον Ἰησοῦν, λαβόντα ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσαντα εἰπεῖν, Τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς την ἀνέμνησίν μου.

“ For the apostles, in the memorabilia composed by them, which

tions the four Gospels, and I am inclined to think that more than that number were in general circulation, and some, perhaps, e. g. the gospel of the Hebrews, nearly as valuable as those which we at present possess. But I suspect that the number was never fixed to four, till Irenæus made the notable discovery that there must be four gospels and no more, because there are four winds, four quarters of the heavens, four faces of a cherub, &c. ; and this seems the more probable, as to this day the four faces of the cherub are the symbols of the four evangelists ; v. g. the ox, I think, is the symbol of Matthew, the angel, of John, &c. Still, however, the main part of the respective gospels must have been written by the authors to whom they are attributed ; otherwise, how could the whole Christian world be so unanimous in ascribing them to those authors ? But before they were universally known and acknowledged, I am inclined to believe that those who were in possession of early copies made additions of narratives which they believed to be authentic, which accounts for the interpolations which they now contain. And it seems to me, that Matthew has been more corrupted than any of the rest ; and Mark, perhaps, the least, because of its brevity."

On entering upon a new year, Mr. Belsham records his feelings and anticipations in his usual manner, and adds,

are called gospels, have thus reported that Jesus, exhorting them, took the bread and gave thanks, and said, This do in remembrance of me."

(Not having a copy of Justin Martyr, the writer is obliged to a friend for this extract.)

“Jan. 1st.—If I live, my chief object is to finish the Epistle to the Romans. I am now reprinting my Life of Lindsey, and am about to print three Sermons on the connexion of Christianity with the civil power.

“O God! strengthen the hands of thine unworthy servant. While I live may I be employed in thy service, and if I am removed hence, may I, without hesitation, without fear, and without reluctance, follow thy call.”

The sermons to which Mr. Belsham here refers soon issued from the press. In the first he pleads, “that Christianity deserves and requires the support of the civil power,” and in stating what that support should be, he includes the protection of its teachers, public structures for religious worship, provision for the support, and even for the education of its ministers, providing a national liturgy, allowing a reasonable intermixture of free prayer; and argues, that all this might advantageously contribute to the support of Christianity, if, indeed, it be not necessary to it.

In the second sermon, Mr. Belsham states the objections which may be urged against establishments of religion with the strength and fairness he is accustomed to do when he undertakes the cause of an opponent; but his answers will not appear altogether satisfactory to those who contend, as he himself suggests, that truth wants nothing but liberty to display and exert itself, and that all the protection which its professors need from the civil government, is that to which they are entitled as peaceable subjects. Whatever countenance or pro-

tection is given by the state to public opinion, whether on religious or other subjects, more than this, must be productive of evil rather than good.

In the third sermon, in which Mr. Belsham disclaims and denounces the aid and protection of civil penalties, he stands upon firm ground, and displays his usual liberality ; but, in his general statement he seems to forget, that what he considers as legitimate protection and assistance would, in many cases, be analogous to the imposition of penalties. If a belief in Christianity be supported by the legislature, unbelief, in the same degree, will be discountenanced, and be considered as ignominious. But this ought not to be the case. Mr. Belsham himself would have allowed, that one who rejected Christianity might do it on conviction, and might not only be sincere, but laudably zealous for what he considered truth ; and in character, temper, and disposition, might be worthy of the Christian name ; and why should such a person be indirectly reproached for unbelief, or why should he be required to contribute to the support and establishment of that which he believes to be untrue ?

In the opening of the second sermon Mr. Belsham says, “ It is well known that the great body of Dissenters in this country almost unanimously disclaim all interference of the civil power of every kind and in every shape in the concerns of religion. It is their constant language, ‘ that Christianity needs it not, that Christianity requires it not ; that the Christian religion can stand by itself without the aid of the civil power, and even in opposition to it ; that it is degraded, disgraced, and impeded

rather than advanced by the interposition of human authority ; and that it is even an affront to the Christian religion, and an insult upon the authority of Christ, as the sole head and governor and protector of his church, to suppose that it requires the puny support of the civil magistrate.' And some of their most eminent and approved writers have advanced so far as to maintain the position, ' that no one is worthy of the name of a Protestant Dissenter, who separates from the established religion upon any other ground than that of a denial of the right of the civil power to interfere in the concerns of religion.' "

. And the present writer well remembers when this was Mr. Belsham's own language ; when he used to say, and say truly, that establishments of religion, hitherto at least, have been establishments of error, which has been propagated and continued by their means much longer than it would otherwise have been ; and that truth would be more widely and rapidly diffused if it were left to its own energies, to recommend itself by its simplicity and beneficial tendency, unsupported, or as it might rather be said unshackled, by any foreign aid.

It is not to be expected, nor is it desirable, that any one's opinions should remain invariably the same, and Mr. Belsham had a right to claim the liberty which is claimed by others, to alter his sentiments upon this or any other subject, if he saw, or thought he saw, reason for so doing ; but it is singular that one who usually reasoned so justly as Mr. Belsham did, and whose views were so comprehensive as his were, should not perceive that, how

liberal soever the establishment of Christianity might be which he proposed, still there would be sectaries who would be excluded from the provision made for the leading classes of professed Christians, and who would derive no advantage from such an establishment, and that they would be in the same situation in which Dissenters now are. Their peculiarities of opinion might be regarded by others as unimportant, but as they would not appear so to them, it would be equally unjust that they should have no support from those funds to which, in common with other members of the community, they would be obliged to contribute: not to mention, that the irreligious and the unbeliever would think it as great an imposition upon them to support any form of religion, as persons in health would regard their being obliged to support the physician to whose assistance they had no occasion to resort.

In writing to his friend Mr. Broadbent in reference to these sermons, Mr. Belsham acknowledges the singularity of his opinion: "I do not wonder that I make very few proselytes—indeed, among my old friends, I do not know that I can boast of one minister who thinks with me; but it is very difficult to change long-established opinions; and we are so accustomed to look at the *evils* of an establishment, that it never occurs to us to inquire whether something may not be said on the other side. I have no doubt that Christianity would live even under a state of oppression, if persecution did not proceed to extermination, And it would be sure gradually to make its way, if it were left quite at liberty, receiving no aid, and encountering no op-

position from the civil power. But I believe it would make its way much more rapidly, and consequently much more beneficially for mankind, if it were wisely and judiciously encouraged by the civil power. And I think it has derived more benefit than it has sustained injury from the patronage which it has actually received, though that has not always been judiciously applied."

This last is a most singular opinion, believing as Mr. Belsham did, that they have been the corruptions of Christianity, which establishments have hitherto supported, and that truth, if left to its own operation, must and will prevail. He might well add, "This, however, is a question about which it is not to be expected that inquisitive persons will always agree."

The following letter to Dr. Carpenter contains a satisfactory explanation of Mr. Belsham's views and sentiments on some important subjects :

" Essex Street, April 1, 1820.

"MY DEAR SIR,

"I thank you for a copy of your very able and learned reply to Magee, and for your very kind defence of my character. For my own part, I am very little affected by such gross attacks, which I am sure that the libeller himself does not believe ; and which none of his readers, whose opinions are of any value, can give credit to. In short, acting, as it is ever my desire to do, from a sense of duty, I leave it to Providence to protect my character. And if some think worse of me than I deserve, I must console myself, like Dr. Priestley, with the

consideration that others entertain too favourable an opinion of me. I am, at least, clear from that *woe* which is denounced upon those of whom all men speak well.

“ I observe that you state that you differ from me upon the subject of the death of Christ. As you profess to believe that Christ is a mere human being, I cannot imagine in what respect we can materially differ. As to any thing worth calling atonement, expiation, &c., Trinitarians and Arians, who seriously believe the doctrine, will laugh at any pretence that we can make to the belief of it. And as to the rest, though I may use expressions which you may not approve, and vice versâ, yet at the bottom the difference must be very trifling, and not worth holding out to the world as an affair of great importance. For the religious observation of the Lord's-day, as a day of public worship, I have always been a sincere advocate. With regard to the *sabbatical* observation of it, every learned Christian must *know* that it was neither instituted by Christ nor his apostles, nor required in the church till the time of Constantine, nor in all its rigour till it was established by an obscure Spanish Council in the sixth century, the decrees of which were never adopted by the generality of continental Christians, though they happened to be received by the Puritans in these islands. This I mention as undeniable matter of fact. Whether we have improved upon the institutions of Christ and the apostles by making that *obligatory* which they have left free, may reasonably be doubted. But I think

that, according to the views which some entertain of the Sabbath, Christ and his apostles are chargeable with a sad oversight in not plainly and explicitly enjoining so necessary an institution.—I have nowhere stated at large to the public my thoughts on inspiration: but upon that subject I apprehend that is impossible that we should materially differ. Upon the genuineness of the introductory chapters to Luke, we certainly do not agree. I can by no means satisfy myself with angels which have Hebrew names, or which chaunt anthems in the air. But still if I admitted the facts recorded in the two chapters, I must believe in the miraculous conception, which is related in terms the most explicit, and almost beyond the limits of *decency*, Luke i. 35, which can admit but of one interpretation, viz. that the Holy Spirit was the father of the child.

“As to Dr. Magee, my dear Sir, you have quite laid him upon his back, never to rise again in the estimation of any reader of common principle and common candour. And if bishops possessed a sense of shame, shame would burn his cheek to cinder. All this he knows very well, as Horsley did before him. But what does Bishop Magee care for all this? Like your prototypes, you both retire from the field equally well satisfied, you with your victory, and his Lordship with his mitre.

“I hope I have not said any thing to give offence in what I have stated concerning the points in which we appear to differ; my only design is to shew that our ultimate differences, when we understand each other's meaning, can be but very trivial.

“ Believe me, dear Sir, with great regard, and with the best wishes for your health and usefulness, very incereely yours,

“ T. BELSHAM.”

Mr. Belsham's reflections on the return of his birth-day, though expressed with great animation and thankfulness, are very similar to those which have already been presented to the reader. At the close he observes, “ My health has been so good during the past year, that I cannot help hoping I may be spared to complete the Epistle to the Romans, and to look over some sermons for the press. I should be glad to revise and publish a new edition of the Elements of the Human Mind, but I doubt whether I shall have either time or power. But while I live and am able, I am desirous to work. Night is fast approaching, when the season will be over, and that of retribution will commence. For that season may I be duly prepared, and then all will be well.”

On the 23d of May he had an attack, as he was rising a little before six o'clock, which gave him great alarm, and which, from his own description, seems to have been of a paralytic nature. It might, however, have been, as he afterwards imagined, “ an accidental numbness of the limbs,” (the legs and feet,) which occasioned his falling, and disabled him from rising, till after a second fall and a further struggle he succeeded, and gradually recovered from the trepidation which the accident occasioned. After considerable exercise in the course of the day, in the evening he was apparently well, except a

little faintness. After recording these circumstances he adds, "What was this attack? Was it apoplectic? Was it paralytic? Is it liable to return? Is it a warning to 'set my house in order'? Surely it is high time that this were done; and, in truth, I have been endeavouring to bring my concerns into the best order. But with regard to some things they must be left as they are. I cannot entirely dispel the cloud that hangs over my future prospects. O that I had the feelings and the anticipations of a Price, a Lindsey, or a Priestley! O God, thou knowest all things—thou knowest, on the one hand, how faithfully, how painfully, how laboriously, I have endeavoured to serve thee, and to approve myself to thee, and to promote the knowledge and diffusion of truth and virtue; and thou knowest, and I also know, how numerous, how great my failings have been. I have no claim to merit; I have no hope but in thy mercy; free, unbounded, unchangeable, everlasting mercy; the mercy that will renovate and pardon. O let me hope, that when I rise from the prison of the grave, I shall rise without an affection, without a thought, inconsistent with that purity and perfection of character, which is essential to pure and perfect happiness."

In the course of the year, meeting with great and very liberal encouragement from some of his friends, Mr. Belsham determined on the immediate publication of the work on which he had been so long employed, his Commentary on the Epistles of Paul, and for which he made the necessary arrangements. In referring to it he thus writes to his friend Mr. Broadbent, Nov. 14th: "It will give

me great pleasure if the work in any degree answers the expectations of my particular friends, and greater still, if it is the means of exciting attention to the Epistles of Paul, and making that invaluable writer more generally understood, even though it may not contain that curious matter, which many of my inquisitive friends might wish to find in it. In fact, I think, that the proper use and design of the Epistles of Paul is almost universally and totally misconceived. It is generally thought that their chief design is to add a few mysterious doctrines to those which had been previously taught by Christ. But, in truth, they contain nothing of this kind; and the great use of the Epistles is, that they exhibit the character, the feelings, the zeal and fortitude, the hopes and fears, the views and exertions, of the man, who was particularly selected by Christ to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, in the very extraordinary circumstances in which he was placed. And in this view they supply an argument for the truth and divine original of the Christian religion, which, when it is properly attended to and thoroughly understood, I should think that no prejudice can resist and no time impair. This is a light in which the Epistles have not been generally viewed, and yet, in my estimation, it is by far the most important in which they can be considered; and when read in this view, as detailing the natural feelings and views of an extraordinary person, placed in very extraordinary circumstances, they are a source of inexhaustible interest and delight. And I shall be happy if I can contribute in any degree to their being regarded in this view, in which they will be

found to be a source of harmony and concord in the Christian world to a greater degree, I trust, than they have hitherto been a source of discord and confusion.”

Mr. Belsham concludes his remarks, in his record of the year, with those reflections which the lapse of time and his peculiar circumstances naturally suggested.

“ Sunday evening, Dec. 31.—I begin the review of the past year with the enumeration of those friends whom I have lost by death since the beginning of the year. The catalogue is numerous and affecting. Those whose names I have noticed are twenty-nine, a greater number than I ever before registered, and most of them nearly contemporaries with myself. Surely these are very solemn admonitions to prepare for death ; an event which, in the nature of things, must be very near at hand.

“ The most important event relating to myself is the finishing of the Translation and Commentary upon the Epistles of Paul, and undertaking to print. My friends have generously subscribed for two hundred and fifty copies, in quarto. It will be at least a year before it can be printed. As long as life and health are spared I will do my best to improve the work, and to superintend the press. Whether I shall live to see the close, is an event which I desire to leave in the hands of Him who ordereth all things well. His will be done.

“ This year, as usual, has been crowned with goodness—life continued—health even improved, though yet very precarious—all necessaries, all comforts supplied and abounding ;—the kindness and li-

berality of friends I would particularly acknowledge. How much has the goodness of God surpassed all expectation and thought ! I made a fine speculation when I forsook all for God and conscience.”

Mr. Belsham’s diary in the year 1821 opens with a strong and lively expression of his feelings.

“ Saturday, Jan. 6th.—I have just entered upon another year under circumstances that are very peculiar. I have undertaken to print my Translation and Commentary upon the Epistles of Paul. What shall I render to God for his great goodness ! It is a great undertaking at my age. But the work is begun ; and from the present state of my health I may almost indulge the hope that I shall live to finish it. To me it is a very pleasant employment to correct and improve the copy as it goes to the press. This is indeed a bright green which is diffused over the evening of my days. I must acknowledge that God has been a very kind and bountiful master to me. He knows the simplicity of my heart in its searches after truth, the difficulty and the agony with which I abandoned old principles and old connexions, the long and painful struggles of my mind, my earnest prayer for divine direction, and, finally, my utter renunciation of all earthly possessions, earthly friends, and earthly prospects, and the confidence with which I cast myself upon his protecting providence. And, O God ! how severe the trial, and how long before one ray of hope and comfort darted upon my benighted mind ! All was dark, all was threatening, all was alarming, ‘all things were against me.’ I felt as if I were given up to poverty and solitude and sor-

row. But, O what a change at length took place ! And from year to year since 1794, when I was chosen to succeed Dr. Priestley, my prospects grew brighter and brighter. My failings and follies were overlooked, and I was blessed with accumulated kindness. And since 1805, when my connexion began with this congregation, (Essex Street,) every succeeding year has been crowned with additional mercy, and the last most of all. What kind and generous friends ! So many, far more than I was aware of, pleasing acknowledgments of benefits received from my public ministrations, and eagerness to testify respect and kindness ! How much, how infinitely has the goodness of God transcended, I will not say my merits, but my expectations, my wishes, my conceptions ! I have forsaken all for him, for truth, and a good conscience ; and how has he repaid me ? In this life a hundred-fold ;—and O ! may I hope that in the world to come it will be everlasting life !”

“ Monday, April 23.—I have this day been attending my friend Mr. Joseph Travers’ remains to the tomb. Dr. Rees officiated ; a most admirable, pertinent, and appropriate address. It is remarkable, that upon this occasion there were six persons present who had been school-fellows with one another and with Mr. Travers, at Ware. It was an affecting meeting. The family sincere mourners. Two years, I may say two months ago, I thought his life much better than my own. But he is gone—and I must soon follow. May I be prepared !”

“ Thursday, April 26th : eight in the morning—Æt. 72. Is it possible ! What right have I to

this great privilege? beyond many, beyond most of my contemporaries,

Firmer in health, greener in age,
And stricter on their guard, and fitter far
To play life's subtle game.

YOUNG.

“Where are they now? Here am I, deserted as it were by all the companions of my youth; by those with whom I was accustomed to converse, and read, and study, and pray,—‘with whom I used to take sweet counsel, and go to the house of God in company;’—yes, with those with whom I used to reason and dispute, sometimes warmly, but seldom or ever angrily, upon topics of the deepest research, of the most subtle disquisition, of the highest importance. They are all gone. I meet with no one now who will talk and reason with me on these momentous points. By some, I am looked upon with aversion and horror, and am shunned as the enemy of moral and of Christian truth, and the perverter of the doctrine and the morals of my contemporaries. By others, I am treated with far greater respect than I have any right to claim. I thank God I have always been a lover of truth; and, as He knows who reads the heart, a most sincere, diligent, and, as far as was in my power, an impartial inquirer after it. And with what earnestness I sought his direction and assistance, He only knows. I bless God, I trust, I even feel confident, I have not sought in vain. I have detected the errors of my education, I have been taught to separate the precious from the vile, the wheat from the chaff, and I have, not without some hazard and loss, publicly professed, and boldly, but I trust not with

a bitter and acrimonious spirit, defended what I believed to be moral and Christian truth. And I have had my reward—far beyond any thing I ever thought of or aspired to ; O how far beyond my poor deserts ! In the present life, in worldly possessions, all I sacrificed has been amply, abundantly restored ; ‘full measure, pressed down, and running over.’ I set out in life with a bare subsistence, and I have now not only competence, but what I may call affluence ; all that I want for myself, should I at this moment be laid aside, and much for the use of others, if I have a heart so to apply it. In lieu of the friends who have forsaken me, and the friends that are departed, how many have crowded in to supply their place ; though, alas ! the attachments of youth can never be made up.—And with regard to reputation, I should be ashamed of what I possess, if it were not counterbalanced by the inveterate prejudices of many, generated and fostered by the false, foul calumnies of a few. I am willing to make whatever sacrifices may be necessary either for the acquisition of truth, or the profession of it, and desirous to maintain a conduct consistent with my profession. Higher than this I desire not my merits to be rated. And if I may be at last accepted of Him who is the unerring Judge of truth and right, this is all my salvation and all my desire. God knows I have not courted worldly estimation, and that it has ever been my maxim, ‘Suffice it that their names are written in heaven.’

“I am now in my seventy-second year. I am surprised to find that old age possesses so many

attractions and enjoyments. I hardly recollect any year in my life in which I have had more real, solid enjoyment than during the last—my health in a great measure uninterrupted, almost entire freedom from pain, with the exception of a lumbago for a few days. I have been in many places, and have enjoyed much pleasing society, both abroad and at home. I feel increasing debility, and am sometimes ready to smile when I think how I labour and toil to accomplish a task of which I once thought nothing. But while I sit still and write at my desk, I feel no inconvenience. I am conscious of great and increasing failure of memory, which must gradually bring with it the failure of the other powers. But at present I am not conscious of a material failure, and I go through my public services with comfort, and, as far as I can judge, not without acceptance. I doubt whether I shall ever resume my lectures. And if I could meet with a colleague, or one that would be acceptable as my successor, I should now think it my duty to resign my place. In the mean time I do my best. I have been very busily and delightfully employed in preparing my Exposition of the Epistles, for the press, in which I have met with encouragement far beyond my expectation, which induces me to labour, that I may render the work as fit as possible for the public eye. And I confess that it would be a high gratification, and is an object of earnest desire, that it may please God to spare my life to finish this important work, and to hear the judgment of my friends upon it. But, O my God, thy will be done, and let not my fond wishes, as, indeed, I know that they will not,

retard for a moment the execution of thy sovereign pleasure. Accept the offering which I desire to present to thee, of the latest, and I would fain persuade myself, the best fruit of my exertion in the cause of Christian truth; and accept my grateful acknowledgment for that seasonable, that unexpected, and most liberal remuneration which thou hast put it into the hearts of my friends to make for the service, however unimportant, which has been thus performed. Into thy hands I commit myself, O Lord God of truth. Prepare me for thy whole will. Dispose of thy aged, and I would say of thy devoted servant, in the way which thou knowest to be best. On thy infinite mercy, and on that alone, I rely. Amen, amen."

The following declaration, extracted from a letter to Mr. Broadbent, dated Jan. 17th, strongly describes the integrity of mind which Mr. Belsham so diligently cultivated, and for which he was so eminently distinguished;

"I heartily wish the work may do the good which the author intended, and that the friends whose solicitations have called it forth to the public may not be disappointed in it. I can at least answer that, whether right or wrong, it is such a comment as does not, at present, exist in the English language. And I can also solemnly declare, that I have not, in any single instance, wilfully misrepresented any passage, but have given what appeared to me the genuine and proper sense of the text. And I feel a great advantage in not being hampered with the notion of inspiration;* so that I

* Mr. Belsham means the commonly-received doctrine of Plenary

feel no difficulty in stating what I believe to be erroneous, either in the apostle's positions or reasonings. Neither am I under any temptation to conceal my own sentiments under dark and ambiguous language. I have no object but truth, and to express truth clearly and intelligibly. And I am very confident that, till we come to read the Epistles of Paul with the same freedom from prejudice, and with the same liberty of candid and liberal criticism that we would exercise upon the Epistles of Cicero, or of Pliny, we can never fully understand the apostle's meaning,—that we can never properly estimate his character,—and that we can never derive that instruction and that satisfaction from his writings which they are calculated to afford."

In the autumn of this year, Mr. Belsham published a sermon which called forth much animadversion, and by some was severely censured, as sapping the foundations of a proper faith in the genuineness and truth of the Mosaic history. This discourse, entitled, "Reflections upon the History of the Creation in the Book of Genesis," was delivered at Warrington, and published at the request of the ministers then present, and of the congrega-

Inspiration, extending to every thought and sentiment which the apostle dictated, and even to the language in which it was expressed. As far as inspiration was necessary to give authority to the apostle's teaching and doctrine, Mr. Belsham admitted its full influence. In the preliminary discourse to this work, p. 36, he says, "It may justly be concluded, that the apostle carried in his mind at all times, in all places, and to the end of life, a complete and infallible knowledge of the doctrine of Christ, so that whatever he taught or wrote upon that subject is to be received as true, and as of divine authority; nor is it of the least consequence to ascertain whether that which he delivers be in any other sense inspired."

tion. Mr. Belsham's object is to shew, that the theology contained in this historical document, if such it be, is correct and sublime, teaching that there is a God, the creator, the former, the sovereign, the proprietor and lord of the heavens and the earth and the seas, and of all their productions and inhabitants; that he is possessed of almighty power, of unerring wisdom, and unbounded goodness, and is the sole object of all religious homage and adoration; but that the philosophy of this very ancient record is false, and originated in the imperfect knowledge then attained, or rather, in the common and popular errors respecting the creation of the world, which existed at the time when this account was written. This latter position was warmly controverted by persons of considerable ability and piety, who contended, that the history might justly be considered as written by Moses, under the influence of inspiration, and that his description of creation is not only reconcileable to the discoveries of modern philosophy, but supports and establishes them. There were, however, many who agreed with Mr. Belsham, both in the statement which he has made of the prevalent notions respecting the phenomena of nature which are described in this chapter (Gen. i.), and in assuming that the documents on which this part of the history is founded, whether written or traditionary, were of different kinds, and are to be assigned to different periods, as is evinced by the different names of the Supreme Being which are used in the several parts of the narrative. In this opinion he is supported by the learned Eichorn, and by others well versed in the

Hebrew language. It was some satisfaction to Mr. Belsham to receive the approbation of those whom he considered as competent judges of the argument and of the merits of this discourse, among whom was the writer of the following letter,* whose name it is no longer necessary to conceal :

“ Hatton, Nov. 31,† 1821.

“ DEAR AND LEARNED SIR,

“ I beg of you to accept my best thanks for the admirable sermon which you have done me the honour of presenting to me. You cannot be wholly unprepared to hear, that your views of the subject are, almost in every respect, the same with my own. I think that, for the instruction of our countrymen, the little French work which you mention ought to be translated; and in these eventful times, when the spirit of inquiry is sharpened by persecution from intolerant confederacies and temporizing judges, such a translation will meet many readers, and prepare them for other researches which you and I think important. The style of your sermon is entitled to great praise for perspicuity and vigour, the arrangement of your matter is exact, and the glowing representations of the Deity which you occasionally introduce were, to my mind, most captivating. Next year, I shall most certainly read your sermon to my congregation, and I shall take care to let them know who is their instructor. I should have been sorry to interrupt the attention of

* Published by Mr. Belsham, in the Monthly Repository.

† So in the original.

the reader by many notes. I cannot, however, help expressing my wishes that you had bestowed four or five lines upon the explanation of the word *created*, as it stands in our common version; and surely, without impropriety, you might have offered a little instruction to your readers about the words, The evening and the morning *were* the first day. Geddes has touched upon the subject, and Purver, whose translation is too much neglected, will, in his notes upon the passage, furnish some useful matter. I have the honour to be, dear Sir, your very respectful and obedient, humble servant,

“S. PARR.”

At the close of the year, December 31st, Mr. Belsham observes,

“The shafts of death have been making their inroads, as usual, upon my few remaining friends and contemporaries. If the number of deaths is smaller, it is because the number of such friends diminishes every year. This year has unexpectedly deprived me of some of my earliest associates. The following are among others whom I have noted in my diary:

“Feb. 14, Dr. Lindsay, suddenly at the Library,* while attending a meeting of the general body (of Dissenters) to discuss Mr. Brougham’s Bill. He had felt himself better that morning than usual, and was in excellent spirits. What produced the sudden change could not be discovered, though the body was opened. He was universally

* Dr. Williams’s, Red-Cross Street, of which he was one of the Trustees.

esteemed and beloved, and his death lamented as a public loss.

“Feb. 18, the Rev. W. Blake, of Crewkerne, after a short illness, from a fever which he took by sitting in wet clothes. He was a very sensible and truly excellent man, greatly missed and lamented in his neighbourhood.

“Feb. 26, the Rev. T. N. Toller, of Kettering, very suddenly, æt. 66. He had been settled at Kettering forty-six years. A very pious and popular preacher, and more liberal, I believe, than many of his admirers supposed.

“April 14, Mr. Joseph Travers, with whom I have been intimate ever since we were at school at Ware. He was considered as a very honourable man. He avoided speculation, applied close to business, and never spent more than his income.

“June 4, Thomas Cobb, Esq., of Banbury, long a member of Essex-street Chapel.

“July 21, Dr. Thomas Morgan, after a long illness, in which he suffered much. He was buried in Dr. Williams’s tomb, by his own desire, and Mr. Aspland spoke over the grave.

“July 26, Mrs. Cappe, of York, æt. 78, very suddenly in the night, without any previous illness. A most excellent and accomplished woman, uncommonly active in doing good, and particularly in promoting the education of young persons.

“Nov. 13, Richard Hall Clarke, Esq., of Bridwell,* of great note and high respectability among the Unitarians in the West of England.

* Near Colhampton, Devonshire. It is gratifying to the feelings of the present writer to bear his sincere and ardent tribute of respect

“In the review of the year I have much to be thankful for, and particularly for the preservation of my health, which has been almost uniformly good, with the exception that I continually grow weaker, and that my memory fails me much. But I have unspeakable reason to be thankful that I have been spared to prepare so large a portion of my Commentary upon the Epistles for the press. This is more than I expected. I hope to finish it in May, if it should please God to spare my life.

“The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places, and I often reflect with astonishment that I am able so easily to go through the duties of my office, and that my services continue to be so acceptable as it appears they are; for though changes are continually taking place in the congregation, some dying and some leaving, yet their places are supplied by others, and the number of applicants is greater than we can supply. The goodness of God in enlarging my circumstances towards the close of life is truly remarkable; so that I need not now deny myself any thing that I want for ease and comfort. I have all and abound. Who am I, O God, and what are my claims and merits, that thou hast brought me hitherto?”

The record which Mr. Belsham makes of his thoughts and feelings, even with the repetition of

to the memory of this early friend of his youth, in whose family he resided four years and a half, and officiated, the latter part of that time, as minister of a chapel erected by Mr. Clarke, for the worship of the One only living and true God. For unaffected piety, strict integrity, and genuine Christian charity and benevolence, Mr. Clarke had few superiors.

sentiment which frequently occurs, becomes more interesting as the close of his useful and laborious life approaches. Nor is it less pleasing to observe the satisfaction and pleasure which he expresses in the enjoyment of which these years were susceptible, and in the accomplishment of the work in which he was engaged, and which, happily, he lived to complete. On the commencement of the year 1822, he has made these remarks :

“I have now entered upon another year, and whether I shall live to see the close of it God only knows; nor would I entertain any anxious thoughts, either about the time or the manner of my removal. My times are in the hand of God, and upon him would I cast all my care, humbly hoping that ‘as my day is, my strength will be.’

“I have a great deal more work to do than the remaining period of life will allow me to complete, even if it should be lengthened out beyond what it is at all reasonable to expect. But I hope and pray that I may be permitted to finish my Exposition. But God’s will be done. Thankful I am to have been spared so long to proceed so far. After this I would republish, with improvements, my Philosophy of the Human Mind. Also, two volumes of Sermons, Prayers, and Services for the Lord’s Supper, and Baptism. And O, if I could publish my System of Theology, my ambition would be satisfied.”

It appears that Mr. Coward’s Trustees had expressed their respect for Mr. Belsham and their reminiscence of his valuable services, and not less their sense of his honourable conduct in resigning

the office which he filled at Daventry, by a handsome present, probably wishing to co-operate with other friends in placing Mr. Belsham in those affluent circumstances which would preclude all apprehension and all anxiety as to his external comfort and accommodation, for the short period of declining life. Mr. Belsham acknowledges their liberality and kindness in the following letter :

TO JAMES GIBSON, Esq.

“ Essex Street, Jan. 8, 1822.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I request the favour of you to return my respectful acknowledgments to Mr. Coward’s Trustees for the munificent present which they have been pleased to grant me, as an expression of their respect for my conduct while connected with that trust, and for what they kindly state as the handsome manner in which I withdrew from it.

“ For the whole time that I was connected with the Institution which is under their patronage, it was my earnest endeavour to perform the duties of my office faithfully, however imperfectly ; and it is but justice to add, that I invariably experienced the kindest support from Mr. Coward’s Trustees. My separation from them, which was the most painful act of my life, was the result of an imperative sense of duty, and for that reason I never repented of it for a moment, even though for months, and I may say for years, I had little or no prospect before me but penury, desertion, and solitude. Thank God, the event has been far different from my boding apprehension.

“The liberality which I experience on the present occasion is the more acceptable, as it cannot be dissembled, that my avowed theological sentiments differ materially in some important points from those of Mr. Coward’s trustees, who shew by their conduct, that in the true spirit of Christian charity they appreciate sincerity, however erroneous, as more truly estimable than the most correct system of opinions, where integrity is wanting.

“Mr. Coward’s trustees are charged with the most important trust which is vested in Protestant Dissenters ; and by their late honourable decision* in favour of the great Protestant principle of the right of free inquiry and of private judgment, they have shewn themselves worthy of this proud distinction. May they have the happiness in their collegiate institution to train up many, whose first concern it shall be, in the course of their studies and in the exercise of their ministry, ‘to approve themselves unto God.’ Such pupils will be all that their wisest and best friends can wish. Please to present, &c. Yours,

“THOMAS BELSHAM.”

“Friday night, April 26th.—I have entered the seventy-third year of my age. How great is the goodness of God to me ! I am a wonder to myself and others. Not a day’s illness since my last birth-

* This remark was occasioned by some recent occurrences at the Academy at Wymondly, and the resolution of the trustees not to discountenance free inquiry by dismissing from that institution some of the students who were accused of departing from the standard of orthodoxy.

day; not an hour's interruption, from disease or accident of any kind, in my great work, which I begun, little expecting that I should be able to pursue it without any impediment, and which I am sure I never should have dared to begin at all, had I foreseen half the expense of thought and labour, of vigilance and confinement, which it would cost. I must certainly have added nearly one-third, and have new arranged and new composed nearly two-thirds. A week or two more will finish my task. And how should I have regretted if the work had been published in the slovenly, unfinished form in which it existed when I undertook the revisal of it, and fondly imagined that I had very little to do! Even the Epistle to the Hebrews has cost me immense labour, though I thought it most complete of all. But I found much to alter, much to add, much to arrange. I may now say the work is nearly in as perfect a state as I can make it. It has been a pleasing task. I verily believe that it has contributed to my health. I give thanks to God for carrying me so far, and I trust that he will now enable me to finish the work. And if it should be his pleasure to spare me a little longer to witness the reception it may meet with in the religious world, I should be thankful.—But ‘thy will be done.’

“My sister, Mrs. King, of Dublin, died last Sunday, after a short illness, in the eightieth year of her age. Whose turn it may be next to make the grand experiment, God only knows. ‘My times are in thy hand.’ Fulfil in thy servant all the good pleasure of thy goodness. Accept his humble but

"The liberality which I experience on the present occasion is the more acceptable, as it is dissembled, that my avowed theological views differ materially in some important points from those of Mr. Coward's trustees, who, however, in their conduct, that in the true spirit of Dissenters they appreciate sincerity, however different, more truly estimable than the mere conformity of opinions, where integrity is wanting.

"Mr. Coward's trustees are the most important trust which is vested in Dissenters; and by their conduct in favour of the great principle of the right of free inquiry and of religious liberty have shewn themselves worthy of the trust reposed in them. May they continue to be so. I should be glad to see them in the exercise of their duty, and I have no doubt that their wisdom and integrity will be to my satisfaction, to my satisfaction, And though I have with imperfections, I consider, that no pains should be spared to do justice to the work as worthy of the friends, and of the public at large. And I cannot be sufficiently thankful that life and health have been spared to me, and that it was permitted to be put out into the world in that crude,

imperfect, unfinished state in which it existed when I consented to its publication. Thanks be to God! To his blessing I commend it. Thou knowest the heart of thy servant. My first ambition is to be useful,—my next is to submit to thy will, and to be content that others should have the honour of promoting that glorious cause, thy own cause, which is sure to prevail, and is advancing with accelerated speed, while I am only permitted to rejoice in its success, and to contribute a sincere, cheerful, humble, however unsuccessful effort.

“The great calamity which marks this day, is the sudden death of my old and kind friend, Thomas Smith, Esq., of Easton Gray.* He was attacked by apoplexy, at eleven o’clock in the morning, and died almost immediately.” He was at Watton Park, on a visit to his friend, the late Sir Benjamin Hobhouse, Bart.

It would be foreign to the design of this Memoir to enter into a minute investigation of the plan and merits of this work, which occupied so much of Mr. Belsham’s time and attention. It is certainly the most important and valuable of his published writings, and will be a standing monument of his application and diligence in the study of the sacred Scriptures. In the preliminary dissertation, Mr. Belsham explicitly states what degree of inspiration he ascribes to the Epistles of Paul; and it appears,

* This gentleman was a pupil of Mr. Belsham’s, at Daventry, having entered the academy in the year 1784, and was universally esteemed and beloved at that early period, for the correctness and consistency of his conduct, the urbanity of his manners, and the kindness and benevolence of his disposition.

that though he does not admit that they were written under any immediate divine impulse or miraculous communication, he invests them with an authority which challenges the full and entire confidence of the Christian believer in every thing which the apostle teaches or communicates as the doctrine of Christ, though in other respects the writings of the apostle are to be judged of and interpreted in the same manner as those of any other author, and can only be rightly understood by being examined with the same freedom and impartiality. The analysis which Mr. Belsham gives of these Epistles as they come under consideration, evinces great penetration and judgment. The translation, as might be expected, often differs from that published by authority, but does not unnecessarily vary from it, and where it appears to do so most widely and essentially, is generally supported by some authority or assigned reason; and, occasionally, other translations of particular passages are subjoined, to enable the reader to judge for himself, and to adopt that which appears the best and most consistent. The sections, or divisions into which each of these Epistles is distributed, greatly assist the reader in perceiving the design and object of the apostle. The paraphrase is sometimes diffuse, but frequently is a correct and happy explanation of the sense and meaning of the text, and conveys to the reader a clear idea of the train of the apostle's thoughts, and of the connexion and tenour of his argument. The notes, which are subjoined to illustrate or to justify the translation, shew the extent of the author's read-

ing, and his solicitude to attain for himself and to communicate to others the most correct knowledge of the meaning of the apostle's language. Miscellaneous observations are occasionally introduced, but they serve in no inconsiderable degree to explain the sense of the passages with which they are connected, and the practical application made of the doctrine which is inculcated, is truly edifying and useful. As a theological work it will be differently appreciated by professed Christians of various creeds and modes of faith. Many will hesitate to follow Mr. Belsham in all his explanations and applications of the sentiments and language of Paul, but the work will not be lightly esteemed by any who are desirous of examining and judging for themselves, and of discovering the original design and real meaning of the apostle; and there must be few who would not admit that Mr. Belsham has successfully endeavoured to shew the importance and value of these Epistles, and the ample and convincing evidence they afford of the truth of Christianity, or, in other words, of the divine mission and authority of Jesus Christ, and of the doctrine which he taught and inculcated.

Two editions were published of this valuable work, one in 4to, of which only a few copies more than were necessary to supply the subscribers were printed, and another in 8vo, which has been more widely circulated, and which, with his usual liberality, Mr. Belsham presented to many of his pupils, and his brethren in the ministry. Having signified his intention to present a copy of the 4to edition to

Dr. Parr, if acceptable to his learned friend, he received the following acknowledgment of this attention and respect :

“ Hatton, Oct. 13th, 1822.

“DEAR AND EXCELLENT MR. BELSHAM,

“ I heard with satisfaction and even delight, that you have published an Exposition of the Epistles of Paul ; and happy I was that a task so arduous and so important had been undertaken by a man so eminently qualified to perform it well. I accept with pleasure and with pride your offer to present me with the work, which I shall consider as the most valuable addition to the treasures of theological knowledge which I have the good fortune to possess. Mr. Belsham, I am no stranger to your attainments, to your talents, to your virtues, and there is only one subject upon which I felt surprise and sorrow that we differed so widely. I was charmed with your reply to Bishop Magee, and my opinion of his renowned work is the same as yours. Yet he is a man of parts, and from the orthodox he deserved the preferment which has been bestowed upon him. I have read Dr. Carpenter’s work ; it abounds with good sense and good reasoning, but it wants compression and a more clear arrangement. There is too much repetition, too much boasting, and I am compelled to add, too much acrimony. Yet he is an intelligent and a virtuous man. I have been an attentive reader of the Improved Version of the New Testament, and after making allowance for the zeal of all good men in what they think a good cause, I give them ample

credit for a very useful work. Surely, dear Sir, you will not do amiss by republishing without comments the writings of a celebrated Oxonian, Dr. Wallis, in defence of the Trinity. I have mentioned this to our friend Mr. Yates, who lent me the book. I lent him some rare and curious publications on both sides of the question. I suppose that you are well read not only in Crellius, but in Curcellæus. I recommend Curcellæus to all inquirers. Bishop Pearce was not heterodox, but there is much learning and much honesty in his Commentary. What are we to say upon the opening of John's Gospel? I find great confusion in the order of the first chapter, and I am not without suspicion upon the authenticity of the introduction. I dare not, however, decide. Every year my mind is enlightened by theological publications from Germany, and I am a diligent student in books, scarcely known even by their titles to my clerical brethren. I take no part in any of the controversies, but I am, and ever shall be, anxious to discover what is most probable. Pray send me your book, and present my best compliments and best wishes to Dr. Rees, Mr. Cogan, and Mr. Aspland. If I were seated at Lambeth, I should summon these worthies to my table. As to public matters, I am quite in despair. I have the honour to be, dear Sir, with great respect, your faithful friend, and obedient, humble servant,

“S. PARR.”

In the obituary of the year, Mr. Belsham has recorded the deaths of his sister Mrs. King, and of

his highly-respected and valued friend, T. Smith, Esq., already mentioned; and also, June 2, of Joseph Spurrell, Esq., of Hackney. To the son and daughter of this gentleman he addressed a short, but affectionate and consolatory letter upon the occasion, and in his diary he observes, "Mr. Spurrell was always my friend, and very zealous to have me chosen at Hackney, first as coadjutor, and afterwards successor, to Dr. Priestley. I had spent the day with him on the 1st of April, and on the 8th of June performed the service at his funeral." He adds,

"Dec. 9, Dr. John Aikin, æt. 76. We were schoolfellows at Kibworth, under his father, A.D. 1758; but I had not been much in the way of keeping up acquaintance with him till within the last thirty years, since we both came to London."

Towards the close of the year Mr. Belsham hurt his leg in alighting from a carriage, and the wound being trifling, was neglected, till it became a serious one, and required surgical attention. On this accident Mr. Belsham makes the following remark in his diary:

"Wednesday, Jan. 1st, 1823.—The year begins with rather an unfavourable omen. Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Prentice have looked at my leg, and advise that it should be poulticed five or six times a day, that I should keep quiet, and rest my leg in an horizontal position on a sofa. They say, if neglected, the wound may become dangerous, but at present they see nothing but what will mend with time. I feel little or no inconvenience, and can walk with ease, but that they say is dangerous. I

therefore obey, and wait, I hope, with humble acquiescence for the result, whatever it may be. I have reason to be very thankful for all that is past, and have great reason to place unlimited confidence for all that is to come.”

Resigned and satisfied as Mr. Belsham was with regard to his own situation and circumstances, his mind was greatly disturbed by an event which awakened all his feelings of affection and sympathy. Reflecting upon his own loss, and that of many others, he expresses his deep regret and sorrow in a manner truly affecting and impressive.

“Postscript.—The sequel of this day has been melancholy beyond example. My old, dear, and approved friend, Dr. Samuel Pett, died after a very short, but severe illness.” After describing the origin and progress of his disorder, Mr. Belsham continues, “My own loss is indescribable and irreparable. I have shed very few tears, for my calamity is not to be expressed or relieved by those natural emblems of grief. I feel like one who has lost his only friend, the confidant of his heart, whom he consulted in all difficulties, to whom he opened his whole mind, to whose advice and assistance he looked forward on every emergency, who, he hoped, would receive his dying breath, and to whom he left the disposal of his affairs after his decease.*—To be thus torn away in the midst of

* Mr. Belsham had requested him to be his executor. The following note, dated August 1st, by the post-mark, 1817, is Dr. Pett’s answer :

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

“I could not read without great emotion your confidential and affec-

life, æt. 58, by this sudden, awful, unexpected stroke! O God! what is man in his best estate? To whom now can I look? Who will be my counsellor, who will attend the couch of sickness, who will close my eyes, who will dispose of my affairs? Dr. Pett was as a brother, a second self. He came to Daventry at the age of sixteen, in Nov. 1781. He was my first, my favourite pupil. He was every one's favourite. I used to visit his family; he married my relation. We almost always lived near each other. He often visited me since I left Hackney, and, as years advanced, mutual ease and confidence advanced with them. And now he is gone! *At veniet felicius ævum: quando iterum tecum, sim modo dignus, ero.* Dear friend, farewell! I have one friend left, who, I trust, will never forsake me; and in due time, through grace, we shall meet again where virtuous friends meet and part no more. O glorious hope! Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!"

The injury which Mr. Belsham sustained by the above-mentioned accident, proved to be of the most

tionate note. I shall most readily undertake to endeavour to discharge any trust which you may wish to confide to me. I feel bound to you by the strongest ties of affection and gratitude. You are now the oldest, and have been to me the best friend I ever had. The invariable, uninterrupted kindness with which your whole conduct towards me has been marked, can never be effaced from my remembrance. But I wish you would associate with me in the holy office some one far better fitted than myself to take charge of the MS. labours of your life. But I will talk more upon this subject when I can have half an hour's conversation with you. I have now but a moment for the post. Ever, my dear friend, yours most affectionately and gratefully,

"S. P."

serious and alarming nature. Partly from his age, and partly from his habit of body, the wound enlarged, and assumed a very unfavourable appearance. He first placed himself under the care of Mr. Lawrence, and afterwards was attended by Sir Astley Cooper; for so extensive was the progress of ulceration, that Mr. Belsham was considered in imminent danger. Kindly anxious for the recovery of his patient, Sir A. Cooper exerted his utmost skill to preserve a life so valuable to his friends, and to the religious society with which he was connected, and it was probably owing to the judicious treatment prescribed by him, that the usual result of mortification was prevented. The cure, however, was slow and doubtful, and Mr. Belsham was advised by the late Dr. Rennell, Dean of Winchester, to put himself under the care of Mr. Scott, a young practitioner of some eminence, from whom the Dean had received great benefit in a similar case. By the skill and attention of this gentleman, and afterwards of Mr. Scott, Sen., a complete cure was effected, and Mr. Belsham was able to resume the accustomed duties of his ministerial office.*

* The following extract is from a letter of Mr. Broadbent's, dated Aug. 11, 1823:

"The appearance of your letter gave us no small surprise, and I need not say infinite satisfaction. Mrs. Broadbent brought it me into the library with an expression of delight in her eyes, which I knew to be the harbinger of some extraordinary good. But when I opened the letter and saw its length, and found it written in your usual style, it gave me the highest pleasure, satisfaction, and gratitude. The joyful tidings soon spread through our circle. We have all reason to be thankful that you took the resolution to call in Mr. Scott. I think, however, your former surgeons took the indispensable steps for your preservation at the time, and that the continued opiates were then

But it is probable that his health and constitution were in some degree affected. From this time he found it necessary to make frequent excursions to the country, and resided much at Brighton during the spring and summer, and finally took up his permanent abode at Hampstead, as the air and confined situation of Essex Street were thought unfavourable to his health. During a period of three years Mr. Belsham discontinued his remarks and usual record in his diary, and the only documents relating to this period which the present writer possesses, are letters to his friends, and their correspondence with him. These, however, will be found to be far from uninteresting, and shew, that however his bodily weakness might increase, his mental powers, with the exception of the memory of recent events and circumstances, were undiminished to the last. His judgment was as correct, his discrimination as clear, and his reasoning as conclusive, as at any period of earlier life. Of this there is a decisive proof in the last communication to the *Monthly Repository*, Vol. XXI. p. 466, the original MS. of which is in a feeble and trembling hand, but the statement, as is evident to the reader, is made in the clear and perspicuous manner for which Mr. Belsham was so distinguished.

The following very interesting letter,* describing the spread of Unitarianism in the United States,

essentially necessary, however unpleasant their immediate effects; and I have heard that Sir Astley Cooper attended you with an affectionate interest, almost filial."

* A large extract from this letter is published in the *Monthly Repository*, Vol. XVIII. pp. 534, 535.

must have been peculiarly acceptable and gratifying to Mr. Belsham :

“ Boston, May 3, 1823.

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ I received some time ago your letter of Dec. 24, together with the two discourses by which it was accompanied. For it and them I return my best thanks. I should probably have acknowledged the receipt of it some weeks ago, but heard by accident of your illness, and have not since been able to muster courage to take my pen in hand for this purpose. My last accounts from Liverpool are that you are considerably better, and I fervently pray that this letter may find you past all danger, and restored to your usual comfortable state of health. My father is very comfortable, and preached about a month ago, on the annual Fast Day ; and, I am told, with much ease and vigour, as well as great acceptance. He is nearly 79. I hope, my dear Sir, you will live many years, if it seem good to the Supreme Arbiter, to witness the spread of those views of Christianity which you justly consider so consonant to the doctrines of the New Testament, and so favourable to the happiness of mankind. In this country, not only do they rapidly extend, but they seem also to approve themselves to men of intelligence and worth. Our ex-president, Adams, now 86, and in the full possession of his understanding, you know has been for many years a decided and zealous Unitarian. I saw lately a correspondence between our estimable fellow-citizen, Colonel Pickering, (now 80,) and Mr. Jeffer-

son, upon this subject, and I assure you read it with no small surprise. Pickering, of the genuine race of the New-England Puritans, and of a family for several generations of the straitest of that sect, the most inflexible man since the days of Cato, the zealous supporter of Washington's administration, and after a distinguished career during the revolutionary war, appointed by Washington Postmaster General, and then Secretary of State—bred up by temperament, education, and fierce political rivalry, to abhor Jefferson, who no doubt returned it by a more guarded but a deeper animosity—he writes to the man who seemed almost his natural enemy, in a style truly gentlemanly and truly Christian, to inquire into his sentiments respecting the Christian revelation. He states that many persons believe Mr. Jefferson to be a sceptic, or a disbeliever,—hoping that it is not so, but that his rejection is only that of the irrational, unscriptural, and absurd doctrines which have too often passed for Christianity—hoping, too, that Mr. Jefferson will not permit his celebrated name to descend to posterity as that of a man who disbelieved the doctrines of the Christian revelation, and to be used as an argument against its credibility. Jefferson replies with great good sense and good feeling, and as it appeared to me (scanning his words, you may assure yourself, with suspicious keenness) in a manner open and explicit. He professes his belief in the divine mission of Christ,—his regret that the corruptions of Christianity have so long obscured its glories and prevented its reception,—and his joy that these corruptions are now passing away, and that the doctrine of the Divine

Unity, and just views of the Divine character, are making a progress so rapid and extensive. When I speak of Mr. Pickering, I speak of a man of great intelligence, and of a character which more resembles that of Cato than of any other man. His opinions were changed, many years ago, by the reading of Dr. Price's Sermons, and he has since been a zealous Unitarian. These also are the opinions of General Brooks, Dr. Osgood's parishioner, whose steady liberality of sentiment had an effect the most beneficial upon the good doctor's character and ministrations. He also has had a distinguished military career, and commanded a regiment at the capture of Burgoyne, with great éclat. At the peace, he resumed the medical profession, and continued in it with great reputation for thirty years, and indeed to the present time, to his immediate friends and neighbours. He has been for seven or eight years Governor of this state, with great esteem, and with so much moderation, that even the democrats had almost given up their opposition to his annual re-election. This office he resigned two months ago, to the regret of all.—We have just lost an admirable man, Mr. George Cabot, of this town, a direct descendant, I believe, of Sebastian Cabot. He told me that, more than forty years ago, he met with one or two merchants in a little counting-room, which he pointed out, to devise the means of publishing some liberal tracts, especially Dr. Priestley's little 'Appeal,' and 'History of Corruptions.' When the Dr. was at Philadelphia, Mr. Cabot was a senator in Congress, and his constant hearer and great admirer. Dr. Kirkland preached his funeral

sermon last Sunday, and I hope to bring you acquainted with the character of this pure, able, judicious, and most amiable man. He was a Unitarian, who laid great stress upon the value of these principles, and at one of the last conversations I had with him, he expressed, in terms similar to those in which you are wont to clothe the strength of your belief, that those principles of which we were speaking, would, in no long time, become those of the intelligent and virtuous throughout the United States.

“ I mention these men, my dear Sir, not because they are governors and senators, &c.: these are names, and emphatically in this country, vox et præterea nihil, conferred upon the ignorant and uninformed, and the vulgar: but I mention them as men of sense and reflection, raised, some of them, by these qualities, united with an excellent moral character, from a very humble station to much distinction among their fellow-citizens. They were all educated in the times and principles of orthodoxy; all eminent during their whole lives in active life and the business of the world. That such men should become the supporters and advocates of liberal sentiments, in opposition to early prejudices, and, moreover, at a period of life when zeal is apt to cool, should take a warm interest in the propagation of Unitarian sentiments, I must think, affords no mean presumption that these opinions approve themselves when examined by the grave and intelligent inquirer.

“ But, my dear Sir, perhaps I tire you, and I forget that I am writing to an invalid. Farewell, then, for the present. May the consciousness of a

life devoted to the investigation, and * the zealous inculcation of principles the most interesting and the most important, comfort you in languor and sickness, and cheer the hour, when it comes, which comes to all, with the brightest anticipations. With the greatest esteem and affection, yours, dear Sir,

“ W. WELLS.”

Mr. Belsham's sentiments upon a long and much agitated question are thus stated in a letter to Mr. Broadbent, dated Sept. 19th, 1823:

“ I am not one of Mr. Malthus's disciples to be alarmed at the increase of population ; for, in the first place, it is a blunder of the first magnitude to maintain that population increases geometrically, while sustenance increases only in arithmetical ratio: and, secondly, though it is true that sustenance treads upon the heels of population, this is no new discovery of the reverend divine, for Adam Smith has observed long before him, and many have observed long before Smith, that the supply is proportioned to the demand. And as long as men retain their senses, it must always be so ; for who would be such a fool as to take the trouble to raise more than he can by possibility dispose of? A friend of mine in America is possessed of a hundred acres of land, capable of bearing wheat ; but he cultivates only six ; for that, he says, will supply his family, and he has no vent for the surplus. So that even in the American desert sustenance treads upon the heels of population. It is really astonishing that a doctrine so absurd and so contradictory to plain and obvious fact as that of

* Here the MS. is torn, and a word or two rendered illegible.

Malthus, should have gained a moment's credit with any person of common understanding. And yet it is wonderful to see what numbers are fascinated with it: among others, my late friend, Mr. Ricardo. He made some use of it in his theory of political economy, which I could never well understand. But the true reason, though not his reason, for the great popularity of Malthus's theory is, that it affords the proprietor of land a good pretext for discouraging marriage among the poor; and while they give all possible countenance to a state of celibacy, the moment they enter into that state for which all are intended, and which is the most natural, the most virtuous, and the happiest state of mankind, they are to be discouraged, and to be told, that the table is full, and that there is no room for them—a proposition than which none more unnatural or more hateful ever escaped from the tongue or pen of a human being.”

In the sequel of this letter he thus expresses himself upon another important subject:

“I am glad that Mr. —— is so very acceptable and useful, but I regret that he confines himself to King James's version. What right and title has that version to a pre-eminence above all others? I am persuaded that the superstitious attachment which is shewn to it has a very bad effect, and tends very much to impede the progress of truth. If Mr. —— chooses to continue the use of that version, I hope there is not a Lord's-day passes in which he does not endeavour to correct its errors; otherwise he will not act the part of the faithful champion of truth. We are not to be silent for

fear of giving offence ; but we are to speak the truth boldly and without disguise, and we are to leave the issue in the hands of God. If he choose to make use of us, he will crown our honest exertions with success ; but if we are unsuccessful, still it will be remembered that ‘ we had it in our hearts,’ and the consciousness of integrity and of good intention will be a never-failing source of consolation.”

Mr. Belsham’s recovery was slow and tedious, but was so far advanced as to allow him to resume his correspondence with his friends, and in some degree to pursue his usual studies. In a letter to Mr. Broadbent, dated Nov. 29th, he gives the following account of himself and of his professional attendants : “ Since I last wrote to you I have had the misfortune to lose the assistance of my skilful, attentive, and kind surgeon, Mr. John Scott. He is a young man, not above twenty-four, and in consequence of his very great attention to his profession, he has neglected himself, and is now entirely laid up with a cold, attended with some alarming symptoms, and is gone to spend some weeks at Hastings, whence he will not return till his health is re-established. The consequence is, that I am now under the care of his father, and am obliged to go, twice a week, to Bromley, in Kent, to be examined and dressed by him. He is a very extraordinary man. The business he goes through is wonderful ; and so, I may say, are the cures which he performs. He gives me great encouragement, and allows me more liberty than his son did. He tells me, it would do me no harm to walk from Bromley to Essex Street. He strongly urges me

to resume my public functions, and tells me, as you do, that it will be of use to my nerves. I mean to follow his and your advice, and I think I shall proceed just as if there had been no interruption ; for I must not allude to my own case. My recovery really appears to be almost a miracle, as none of my friends who saw me ever expected that I could get well. I believe I owe it, under God, to the care of my nurse, who would not rest till I was allowed to get up and go into another room. To say the truth, I begin to think, that the greater part of my illness has been brought on by constant confinement to my bed."

It appears that Mr. Belsham did not engage in any public service till Christmas-day, when he preached according to his usual practice, but without making it known that such was his intention, and was not at all discouraged by this first attempt. After this he took part in the public services of the Sunday, and occasionally preached, but not regularly. His health was considerably improved, and the wound in his leg nearly healed ; but he was greatly annoyed by nervous feelings, which were the result of long confinement, and perhaps of the means necessarily used to prevent the spread and effects of mortification. These in some measure subsided ; but he found it necessary to avail himself of every advantage of change of air, and frequent visits to Brighton.

A work so important as the "Translation and Exposition of the Epistles of Paul," by a person well known to have devoted so much of his time and attention to the study of them, would neces-

sarily excite considerable interest, and would be differently appreciated by different classes of professed Christians, and even by those who were accustomed to the investigation of scripture truth. From the avowed sentiments of the translator and commentator, it would be expected that the general character of this version would be in favour of those doctrines and opinions which he regarded as the genuine doctrines of Christ and his apostles. The judgment of persons who adopted a different system of faith and doctrine, of the correctness of this translation, would in many instances be opposed to Mr. Belsham's; but by the friends of truth, and those who professed to study the Scriptures with candour and impartiality, it might be expected, that such difference of opinion would be expressed with courtesy and Christian charity, though with firmness and decision. A writer of a very different spirit, in the fifty-ninth number of the Quarterly Review, made a violent attack upon Mr. Belsham and his writings, and with much invective and calumny endeavoured to represent the author of the Translation as destitute of the learning and ability necessary for so important a work, and the work itself as entitled to no special notice and examination. The article was known to be the production of a very young man, and probably was his first effort of criticism. It is so much beneath the character of sober and impartial investigation, that it is matter of surprise it should have been admitted into the Quarterly Review, which, though not distinguished by singular fairness and impartiality, might claim some merit from the learning and talents of

the writers who generally furnished the criticisms which appeared in this periodical.

Mr. Belsham was himself little disposed to notice the flippant sarcasms and base vituperation of so uninformed and imbecile a writer, justly suspected of wishing to distinguish himself as the zealous opponent of Unitarianism and its advocates, rather than as the cautious and judicious examiner of opinions and the evidence by which they are supported; but he was urged by many of his friends not to suffer such a gross attack upon his character and writings to pass without due reprehension; and and in compliance with their judgment and wishes he took up his pen in his own defence. He has fully exposed the virulence and incompetency of the Reviewer, in a small pamphlet published in the summer of this year (1824), and treated his remarks and insinuations with that indignation and contempt which they provoked and deserved; but perhaps it may be thought that it was unnecessary to put forth his strength against so feeble an assailant, and that it would have been better to have suffered such a tirade of abuse and scurrility to sink into oblivion, which it would soon have done, than to have distinguished the writer by a serious refutation of his calumny, and a formal exposure of his ignorance and malevolence.

Though Mr. Belsham's recovery from the accident which proved so alarming and dangerous was nearly completed, he was affected in a manner which afforded just ground for the apprehension that his life might terminate suddenly, though not unexpectedly. The following is his own account

of his first seizure with that giddiness which so strongly indicated a tendency to apoplexy, and his anticipation of the consequence, extracted from a letter to his friend Mr. Broadbent, dated September 21, 1824 :

“The day that your last letter was dated, the 9th instant, I was taken very ill. I was, as I thought, gradually getting better of the wound in my leg ; in fact, it was almost well, and as I was walking upon crutches through my rooms, I stopped in the front parlour to contemplate the pictures which I have there suspended, of friends, most of whom are now departed to another world. All on a sudden I was seized with a giddiness in my head. I had just time to sit down and call for help ; but before the servants could come, I became insensible. I was, however, relieved by the application of hot water to my feet. Mr. Scott was sent for, and the day after the seizure he met Dr. Lister at my house to consult upon my case. In consequence of their treatment, I am now much better, and was able to preach last Sunday. But I have little expectation of complete recovery, for though my head is relieved, I should not wonder at any time to have another attack, though neither Dr. Lister nor Mr. Scott seem particularly to apprehend it. But I consider myself rapidly approaching to the end of my career, and that there is but a step between me and death. Happy will it be if, at the end of the day, I receive the applause of the Master whom I have in some respects faithfully served, though with much weakness ; so that though I have very little doubt that the end of all will be glorious and happy, I cannot

say that I look forward to the approaching change with that unclouded hope and satisfaction which brightened the setting sun of my excellent and venerable predecessors, Dr. Priestley and Mr. Lindsey, yet still ‘I am looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.’ He whose goodness I have so long and so largely experienced will not finally forsake me.”

In the spring of the year 1825, Mr. Madge, the present eloquent preacher at Essex-street Chapel, was chosen Mr. Belsham’s assistant. This was a great relief to him, and became necessary from the state of his health, and his frequent visits to the country. Mr. Belsham, however, occasionally officiated at his own chapel, and in other places. In a letter dated March 27th, he writes, “I have been preaching to-day at Hackney, for Mr. Aspland, who has been supplying the new chapel in York Street. I do not know when I have seen a finer congregation, but the faces were almost all new to me; they would have been entirely so, had I not been confined five months at Hackney two years ago, during which time I received many civilities from several of the congregation. I went, of course, to see my sister’s* tomb. Little did she once think to have taken up her abode there before me, or that I should occupy the pulpit while she was resting in the grave-yard. So little do we know of what is before us under the sun,”

Mr. Belsham gives the following account of his health and anticipations, in a letter to Mr. Broadbent, dated May 7th, 1825:

* Miss Ann Belsham.

“I feel more and more that I shall not be equal to any distant excursion from home, and I now think of nothing but returning to my old quarters again (Brighton), and to pass the heat of the summer where I may enjoy the invigorating breezes of the sea. In fact, I feel that my thread is spun ; my warfare is accomplished, and I have little more to look for but the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to everlasting life. At the same time I must acknowledge that I have great reason for thankfulness in the present state. I am perfectly at ease. But the state of my head, which often inclines to giddiness, leads me to expect that my final summons cannot be far distant. Still, however, I have got an able colleague, who is willing to relieve me to the utmost. I nevertheless take my proportion of public duty, and I even venture to promise my services at the new chapel in York Street. I have engaged to preach there to-morrow, but from the present state of my feelings I almost doubt whether it will be in my power.* In short, I may truly say of myself, ‘My life is in my hand,’ (as Dr. Young explains it,) ‘like a bird struggling to get loose, scarcely now possessed, so suddenly it is gone.’ I remember Dr. Ashworth preached from that text the Sunday after his return from Bath, where he had been to consult Dr. Moysey, who told him, he had nothing to do but ‘to set his house in order.’

“Mine is now as much in order as I can place it. In my present state, little or nothing can be added

* In the P. S. to his letter, which was written on Monday, Mr. B. says, “I preached yesterday at York Street to a very good congregation. I went through the service upon the whole very comfortably.”

or taken from my character. ‘If I am righteous, I must be righteous still,’ and if I am otherwise, I must remain so still. It is, indeed, my dear Sir, a very awful thing to look death in the face, and to be in hourly apprehension of its coming. I have, indeed, that confidence in the Divine goodness, that I firmly trust that all will be well in the end. But whether even the brightest characters may not need further polishing before they are qualified to reflect the perfect image of God in a higher state of existence, may admit of some question. The grand experiment, however, will soon be tried; and I think we may safely conclude, that the God who has dealt so kindly with us in the first stage and infancy of our existence, will at least shew equal kindness in the progress of our being, and will not finally desert the work of his hands. I often wish, if not for the assurance of Dr. Priestley, at least for the calm, confiding spirit of Mr. Lindsey: but I have been placed in different circumstances, and my constitution and habits are not so equable as theirs; and I fear it will be some time before I shall overtake them in their progress to perfection.”

The idea of his dissolution seems to have been constantly present to Mr. Belsham’s mind. In another letter to his friend (June 17th) he says,

“I lately read, that a Dr. Hunter, when he was dying, about half an hour before he expired, said, ‘that he wished he had it in his power to write how very easy and pleasant a thing it was to die.’ And Dr. Priestley, when he was seized with that suspension of his voice which attacked him a day or two before his death, when he recovered it again,

said, ‘that he never felt himself more easy and comfortable than during the time that he lost his speech.’ And the mother of my worthy friend, Mr. Richard Smith, when dying, (which event took place between the services of Sunday,) inquired of her children, as they stood round her bed-side, what was the subject of the discourse which they had heard at chapel, and who of their friends were present, and who absent, and concluded with expressing how little she felt of pain and uneasiness. Her expression was, ‘that dying was nothing, and that she suffered nothing.’ Indeed, with regard to myself during this long illness, I consider myself as having more than once suffered all that I could have suffered had I never recovered from that state of insensibility into which I had fallen. So that I do not regard the act of dying as deserving all that dread with which it is usually contemplated, and with which, notwithstanding all the experience that I have had, I cannot avoid contemplating it still. It is our best consolation, that we are in the hands of a merciful and faithful God, who knows our frailty, who pities our infirmity, and who remembers that we are dust.

“ A great man is fallen in our Israel, who, at one time, little suspected that he should take his flight before me—Dr. Rees. He has been long declining in health, but very rapidly for the last month. He was ordered down to Worthing about a month ago, but he returned to London almost immediately, for he found no benefit, and could not sleep. I think he attended at his own place of worship last Sunday fortnight. But he was very

ill and much fatigued when he returned home. I called upon him the next day, but he was not well enough to receive me, and I never saw him since. He expired on Thursday morning, the 9th instant, about seven o'clock. He is to be buried to-morrow, and the funeral to be very public. Dr. Rees, in his will, desired that I might be asked to attend as a pall-bearer ; but it will not be in my power to go abroad at all."

On the first of January, 1826, Mr. Belsham thus writes : " I have this day been preaching a new-year's sermon, and I am at present so well, that I feel little or no fatigue in consequence of it. In fact, I may say, what you will hardly believe, that so far as my feelings are concerned, I am in perfect health. But still I would wish not to take ' fine days in winter for the spring,' and I feel that I am now arrived at that period of life, when ' the clouds return soon after the rain,' and though I may be to all appearance, and according to my own feelings, very well to-day, I may very possibly be laid up to-morrow. Of this I have had repeated experience—but I am determined not to distress myself with painful apprehensions of what, after all, may never happen."

After mentioning the sudden death of Mr. Holt, one of the Trustees of Dr. Williams's Library, as he sat at table at dinner, Mr. Belsham being present, he adds, " Had I been well in body or mind I should have been exceedingly shocked at the event,—but I am in a state in which nothing makes any considerable impression upon me, and this awful event, which happened last Wednesday, appears to

me as if it had come to pass six months ago. I feel it as a distant event, though my friend is yet unburied."

Referring to the death of his predecessor and tutor at Daventry, the Rev. Thomas Halliday, to whom he gratefully acknowledges that he was chiefly indebted for his proficiency in classical knowledge, and of whom Mr. Belsham has given a short, but not very correct account in the *Monthly Repository*, Vol. XXI. p. 54, he observes, "How truly, how highly respectable his character once was, and how low had he fallen! It may well teach the important lesson, 'Not to be high-minded, but fear.' A more enlightened, a more devout, a more pious, and a more acceptable and useful preacher than he once was, I never knew. But into what a depth of evil and disgrace was he permitted to fall! He was an extraordinary man; but for the last twenty or thirty years of his life, how lost to himself and to the world!"

In adverting to his friend Mr. Yates's recovery from a serious accident, he observes, "It is not to be expected that he should quite recover his original firmness of constitution. The time must come when we must feel the infirmities of age. And happy they whose path is made smooth and easy in their descent to the chambers of death. I consider myself at present as peculiarly privileged in this respect; though to be sure I have had my share of pains and sufferings. But happily these sufferings do not leave any painful impression upon the mind; and whatever they may be in the present state, there is no reason to believe that there will

be any painful recollection of them in the world to come. I often amuse myself with thinking what an amazing change will be produced by death, and endeavouring to form some conjecture concerning the nature of that state into which I shall shortly enter. But imagination fails. ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive’ what shall be hereafter. ‘Wait the great teacher, death, and God adore.’ The grand experiment must soon be tried, and then we shall know all that we now so much wish to learn, but wish in vain.”

The following is the last entry Mr. Belsham made in his diary :

“Wednesday, April 26th.—This is my birthday. This day I enter upon my seventy-seventh year. It is now three years and a quarter since I wrote in this book. The greater part of the time I have been an invalid and a cripple; and in the month of January, 1823, no one who saw me expected me to live *a month*. I have now lived upwards of *three years*, and have outlived many of my friends and acquaintance who naturally expected to outlive me. My legs have been healed, to the wonder of many; but my head was attacked; and I had a severe fit of apoplexy, in which I should have lost my life, as I did my senses, if very skilful assistance had not been at hand. Last Sunday, April 23, I preached when I had a slight attack of cramp in the stomach. I thought speaking would have carried it off. Instead of that, it fixed and aggravated the disease, and since Sunday I have been a severe sufferer and obliged to give up all my en-

gagements. I am now better, but far from well, and unable to go abroad. But I trust this painful disease will soon be removed.

“ I have undertaken to print a volume of Sermons, which are now in the press. God knows whether I shall live to see them published.

“ It is hardly likely that I shall live to see another birth-day. But let the will of God be done. If it be his will, I beg to be spared the distress and anguish of acute disease. But I bow my head, I trust, with unreserved submission. ‘ The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it ? ’ ”

Writing to his friend Mr. Broadbent, Dec. 1, he says, “ To my great astonishment, upon looking into the Repository for this month, I see an account of the death of my old friend Mr. Yates, on the 10th of November. I do own that I am not a little surprised that the first intelligence which I receive of this afflicting event has been in the pages of the Monthly Repository. I doubt not that the whole family severely feel the loss of their excellent father; and at the same time that I most sincerely sympathise with them, I heartily pray that they may all imitate the excellences of his character, and that they may ultimately meet him again in that happy state, where there shall be no more death, and where all tears shall be wiped away.

“ I have known Mr. Yates, I think ever since the year 1773, when I first went over to Ireland. I then, I believed, preached for Mr. Taylor, in Kaye Street (Liverpool), to which congregation Mr. Yates was soon afterwards elected, upon Mr. Taylor’s removal to Dublin; and the Octagon, in

Paradise Street, was built soon after. I have been upon a very intimate footing with him ever since. He took infinite pains to induce me to accept of an invitation to Warrington, to superintend the congregation and to revive the academy, about the year 1786, while I was tutor at Daventry. I was inclined to do it, because I found that my opinions were deviating from orthodoxy, though I had not at that time gone beyond high Arianism. But I thought I was still too orthodox for Warrington. And I did not think, that at that time I should be acting honourably to Mr. Coward's trustees, who had just put an end to the London Institution, and had united their two academies at Daventry. Upon my refusal, Dr. Barnes commenced his Institution at Manchester, which is now removed to and flourishes at York."

In the summer of this year Mr. Belsham published the volume of Discourses, doctrinal and practical, which he had been preparing. There are none of them which are entirely distinguished by the former title, and those which are especially so, abound with reflections and observations which have the best influence upon the practice. In Mr. Belsham's view, the peculiar doctrines of Christianity were regarded as having this tendency, and whenever he touched upon them it was to exhibit their truth and excellence, and to shew their influence and effects. When his discourses were most philosophical or metaphysical, there was always some moral and practical application, in the true spirit of Christian feeling, supported by Christian motives and principles, which was calculated to

produce the happiest effect upon the mind, and which left it as much impressed with a sense of duty and obligation, as with the conviction of the truth and importance of the doctrine on which it was founded.

It has often been said, that there is nothing original in the effusions of Mr. Belsham's mind. It is not easy to know what is meant by this assertion. If it assumes, that there is no thought which has not been suggested by other writers, no sentiment which may not be found in the works of other moralists and divines, it may be difficult to controvert the truth of the assertion. And where is the author who has not availed himself of the thoughts of others, or whose sentiments, if they be the result of his own reflection, observation, and ratiocination, have not coincided with those of others? The novelty to which the best writers have any claim, consists in little more than the arrangement of their thoughts, or the manner of expressing them. But if the Discourses to which these remarks are applied be compared with those of other writers upon the same subjects, it will be found, in this respect, that Mr. Belsham's are as much entitled to the merit of novelty as any other, and often claim the higher merit of originality of sentiment both in the statement and illustration of opinions which are of great weight and importance, and which deeply impress the mind of the reader. The fact is, that Mr. Belsham had a clear and natural method of arranging and expressing his sentiments, which made them so easy of apprehension, and so perspicuous and intelligible to the hearer

or reader, that they seemed to be familiar. It scarcely occurred to him, that they were new or extraordinary; but he was rather induced to believe, that they were the sentiments which would have suggested themselves to his own mind, had he attempted to arrange his thoughts upon the subject, and were almost the words in which he would have expressed them. There are, however, few who would find this to be the fact, if the effort were made, and a comparison of the result would convince him, that Mr. Belsham was fairly entitled to the praise of an original as well as a perspicuous and impressive writer. Indeed, the style of his compositions is often elevated by the sublimity of the thought which he clearly and happily expresses, and by the dignity of the subject which he ably and judiciously discusses. Instances might be produced from the Discourses above-mentioned, of great strength and beauty, both of sentiment and language, and such as are seldom exceeded by writers on moral and religious subjects.

The following extract is from the last letter to his friend Mr. Broadbent, in possession of the present writer, April 1, 1827: "I am now about to set out upon my journey to Brighton, where I propose to spend the month of April. The air of this great city is certainly very unwholesome and unfavourable to invalids. I was warned, when I first came, that it might not agree with me, having spent the greater part of my days in the country. But I did not take the warning, and for a time appeared to suffer no inconvenience. And yet I rather suspect that my long illness is in a great measure attributa-

ble to it ; for it is remarkable, that when Dr. Baillie was called in to my case, he prescribed nothing but country air. In consequence, I was removed to Hackney, when I could scarcely rise from my bed ; I staid there from May till October, during which time I was attended by Mr. Scott, received great benefit, and recovered my health and strength to a very considerable degree, though I took little or no medicine.

“ On the 26th of this month I enter upon the seventy-eighth year of my age, and may truly say, ‘ Goodness and mercy have followed me all my days.’ I have, to be sure, within the last few years, been a very great sufferer. But though I have gone through a great deal, and should quite shudder at the thought of passing through the same trial again, yet such is the happy constitution of human nature, that no painful sense of suffering remains in the memory, and probably the severity of the discipline through which I have passed, gives a relish to the ease and comfort which I now enjoy. And though I think it presumption to look forward to the months of July and August, I confess that I feel more apprehensive of the heat of summer, than of the cold of winter. After all, it is of little consequence. No attention to temperature or to diet, will make a man immortal ; and when he has reached the age of seventy-eight, he has nothing to do but to set his house in order and prepare for the summons which must shortly arrive.”

The volume of Sermons already published was well received, and was followed by another in the course of this year (1827). Many of these dis-

courses are more strictly doctrinal than those in the former volume, and more decidedly unfold the sentiments and opinions which Mr. Belsham advocated. The fourth sermon, in which voluntary actions and their consequent events are said to be foreknown of God and appointed by him, is a specimen of the strong and unequivocal manner in which Mr. Belsham states his views and sentiments, and of the fearlessness with which he follows them in all their consequences. It is one advantage of this open and ingenuous statement of the doctrine which he advances, that nothing is left to conjecture. The reader never is at a loss to know what Mr. Belsham means, nor to perceive what the result of his opinion must be. Indeed, it is seldom that he leaves this inference to be drawn by the reader, but he specifically points it out and shews its beneficial tendency and effect. The following passage from this sermon supports this representation, and is a fair instance of the clear and satisfactory manner in which Mr. Belsham unfolds his sentiments and beautifully exhibits the conclusion which may be drawn from them :

“ The connexion of the doctrine of Divine Providence with that of the Divine Prescience, is so distinct and inseparable, that no one can, with the least appearance of consistency, admit the one and deny the other. When God began to act he distinctly foresaw, through the utmost extent of boundless space and of endless duration, all the events that would actually take place in the universe, and the manner in which every intelligent being would

act in the circumstances in which he was placed. If he had then seen, that the conduct of an individual, in any circumstances, would have been inconsistent with his grand design, and would have in any the slightest degree interfered with his original and perfect plan, it was in his power to have varied his scheme in such a manner as to have produced a different effect, and to have limited and controlled the designs and actions of every individual in such a manner as to bring them, without any violence or compulsion, within the plan of his providence. Hence we infer the momentous and delightful truth that there is in the universe but **ONE GOVERNING WILL**, that all events are carried on in one uniform course, to an issue most honourable to the Divine perfections, and that all the various contending wills of subordinate agents, whether they know, intend, and approve it, or not, are controlled and overruled in such a way as may be most subservient to the design of the benevolent Creator.

“ This glorious doctrine has lately engaged much of our attention, and I know of no other truth, the firm belief of which possesses so direct and powerful a tendency to cheer, to tranquillize, and to animate the mind, to reconcile us to the perplexities and the vicissitudes of the present state, and to inspire that habitual confidence and joy which no external vicissitudes or disappointments can disturb.”

On the 26th of April, 1828, the venerable subject of this Memoir addressed a few lines to the present writer, requesting him to take the charge of

all his papers, leaving them entirely at his disposal. In the postscript Mr. Belsham observes, "I am 78 years old to-day. I have had a very serious attack this morning, which reminds me, that I must soon put off this tabernacle."

Nearly a year afterwards, Mr. Belsham gives a more affecting account of the state of his health, and of his tranquil expectation of the close of his earthly existence. The letter is addressed to the Rev. H. H. Piper, of Norton, near Sheffield, on receiving from him a sermon, occasioned by the death of the late Samuel Shore, Esq.,* of Meersbrook.

* Mr. Shore died, Nov. 16, 1828, at the advanced age of 90, possessing his faculties to the close of his protracted life. "As to his mental constitution," says Mr. Piper, "in memory only he appeared to suffer the infirmities of age. Generally, his cheerfulness did not forsake him, and his patience and kind attention to others abode with him through all the closing scenes of his mortal career. In his last illness he expressed himself to be perfectly easy in body and mind, spoke of the merciful design of our heavenly Father in the sufferings we must endure, and the necessity of the termination of this life, that we may enter into the life to come. His family have reason to be thankful to God, that, long as he lived, he did not outlive all the possibility of ease, of thought, of usefulness, of enjoyment, of deep interest—though *that* in such a family could never fail—and now he has calmly sunk in death, they have the consolation of knowing, that every thing that ardent love in the dearest relations of life, every thing that unwearied solicitude could do, was done to cheer and soothe the last days of one, who fully merited and amply repaid all that affection could dictate, or unceasing devotion perform."

The present writer esteems it his privilege and honour to have been connected with this truly excellent and venerable man at that early period of his ministry, when the advice, encouragement, and friendship of Mr. Shore were of inestimable value, and his memory is cherished by him with affection and gratitude, founded upon a deep sense of the advantage he enjoyed in witnessing the consistency and dignity of his conduct, the kindness and benevolence of his disposition, and in being permitted to share in his esteem and regard.

“ Hampstead, March 2, 1829.

“ DEAR SIR,

“ I thank you for your excellent sermon for Mr. Shore, which I have perused with much instruction and satisfaction. In earlier life I knew him well, and that both at Norton and at Clapham. He always maintained a dignified character. That such a one should end his long and honourable life in peace is not surprising. May it be our happiness to share his lot. Pray remember me kindly to his mourning widow and surviving family.

“ I am as well as fourscore will allow. My breath is impeded: my articulation is imperfect: and I am entirely laid aside from public service. Here I stand, ‘waiting (as Dr. Watts says) God’s leave to die,’ and suffering no pain. I have kind, very kind attendants.

“ Adieu, my dear Sir. Remember me to whoever thinks it worth while to inquire after me, and assure yourself, that, with best respects to Mrs. Piper, I am, affectionately yours,

“ THOMAS BELSHAM.”

On the 21st of June, 1829, Mr. Belsham wrote to the individual whom he had distinguished by committing his valuable MSS. to his care, in reply to a request, that Mr. Belsham would communicate to him some necessary information respecting the incidents of his early life, in the following terms:

“ I ought to have written to you long ago to have acknowledged with gratitude your kind letter to me, dated May 19, 1828, in which you acknow-

ledge my solicitation of you to accept the office of revising my papers, consisting of prayers, diaries, sermons, devotional lectures, &c., &c., extracting from them any thing which to you might appear worthy of publication.” After enumerating some MS. works which are already published, he adds, “and the remainder of an extensive course of Divinity, in two foolscap vols. 8vo., written in short hand, and bound in black. I should have been glad to have published them myself, but my time has been otherwise employed. It must now be taken up by another hand.—Perhaps when I am no longer in this tabernacle some little curiosity may be excited to hear something about one who has aspired to so little, and about whom so much has been said in the world, as myself. I grant I was ambitious, very ambitious of distinction. It was to know the two apostolic men, Lindsey and Priestley; and I have been gratified beyond what I dared to expect. I have been honoured with the FRIENDSHIP OF BOTH.

“Adieu, my dear Sir; with kind respects to your lady, I remain ever yours,

“T. BELSHAM.”

“I was seized with a dangerous fit the latter end of March, which every one thought would have been my last: but I am wonderfully recovered, and am now as well as ever, to my own astonishment and that of those who have seen me.

“To the Rev. JOHN WILLIAMS.”

The frequent attacks of an apoplectic nature,

with which Mr. Belsham was affected, greatly weakened his constitution and impaired his memory, though he retained his other mental faculties in considerable vigour even to the close of life, of which his observations in the *Monthly Repository* (Vol. III. N. S. p. 239) on Mr. Benson's remarks on Dr. Priestley's *System of Materialism*, &c., are a striking proof, though written in the beginning of the year which put a period to his earthly existence. In these remarks he has manifested all his accustomed clearness, precision, and discrimination, and that lucid arrangement of his thoughts, and perspicuity of expression, which made his writings so plain and intelligible.

About this time, in conversation with his very highly-esteemed friend, Mr. Thomas Gibson, Mr. Belsham spoke of himself and of his approaching dissolution, and of the great pleasure and satisfaction he enjoyed in reviewing the scenes and events of his past life, particularly as derived from those better views which he had adopted of the character of the Supreme Being, and of his government and providence. These, he said, had been the source of the greatest and purest delight, and were the ground of a fervent and joyful hope, that when that event happened, "which happeneth alike to all men," he should, at the appointed time, be united to the society which he loved and valued, and partake with them of that happiness to which his thoughts were so constantly and earnestly directed. Towards the close of the year his health and strength rapidly declined. He was not subjected to any violent or distressing pain, but nature was exhaust-

ed, and he sunk to rest, with the tranquillity and peace of one “ who had finished his course, who had contended honourably in the games,” and who knew and was assured, “ that there was laid up for him a crown of glory, which the Lord, the righteous Umpire, would give him in that day,” “ when he should come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.”

In the retrospect of his life and character, the reader cannot fail to be impressed with the truly pious and devout temper which Mr. Belsham so assiduously cultivated and so habitually maintained. It might be truly said, “ that God was in all his thoughts,” and to the attainment of his favour he referred all his actions. Nor were his zeal and fortitude in the discharge of the most painful duties less worthy of admiration and of praise. His own immediate interest and gratification were never allowed to interfere with what he considered his duty. Wherever that led he was ready to follow, whatever the result or consequences might be ; and he had the satisfaction to know, that by this steady, ingenuous, and resolute conduct, he rose to a station of eminence, highly gratifying to himself, and to estimation as the sincere and zealous advocate and defender of truth, or what appeared to him to be truth, which few have attained. His memory will be dear to those who were honoured with his friendship, who knew the excellence and consistency of his character, the generosity and kindness of his disposition, and the extent and value of his labours. Those who have adopted similar views of the prin-

ciples and doctrines of Christianity owe to him, as well as to his predecessors and colleagues, Priestley and Lindsey, many of those advantages which they have enjoyed in the study and pursuit of Christian truth, have been encouraged and animated by his labours and success, and have in some degree shared in the honour which is reflected upon the cause, by the consistent and dignified conduct of its advocate. If any of Mr. Belsham's surviving pupils, and those who attended his instructions as a Christian Minister, be thus induced to use their utmost endeavours to promote the diffusion of evangelical truth, and to secure its powerful and practical effect upon their own lives and characters, it will not be in vain that the present writer has attempted to set before the reader a faithful, though imperfect delineation of the life and character of a man, whom he so highly respected and venerated, whom he so affectionately loved, to whom, with others, he was so much indebted for the uniform kindness with which he endeavoured to promote the welfare and interests of his friends, and by whose partial confidence he was entrusted with the care and disposal of his papers and of the documents which have been the basis of the imperfect Memoir which is now submitted to the candid perusal and judgment of his friends and the public.

Mr. Belsham's remains were consigned to the same grave, in Bunhill Fields, with those of his venerable predecessor, and of Mrs. Rayner, the kind friend and liberal benefactress of Priestley and Lindsey ; in which also were deposited the remains

of Mrs. Lindsey. The following are the inscriptions upon their common tomb :

In this vault reposes
The Rev. THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, M. A.,
late of St. John's College, in the University of Cambridge ;
and some time Vicar of Catterick, in Yorkshire.
Having resigned his preferments in the Church
for the sake of truth and a good conscience,
He became the founder of the Chapel in Essex Street.
This venerable Confessor
ended his blameless and exemplary life,
the 3rd day of November, 1808, aged 86.

Mrs. ELIZABETH RAYNER,
nearly allied in blood
to the illustrious house of Percy,
esteemed it a still greater honour
to be the friend,
and fellow-worshiper, of
Mr. and Mrs. Lindsey ;
and by her own desire
was deposited in the same grave.
Mrs. Rayner died, aged 84.

Mrs. HANNAH LINDSEY,
relict of the late
Rev. Theophilus Lindsey,
survived her venerable consort
little more than three years,
and full of hope and good works,
expired the 18th of January, 1812,
aged 72.

In this tomb also rests
the Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM,
the friend, associate, and successor of
Priestley and Lindsey.

**With them he devoted his life and talents
to revive and diffuse the knowledge of
the true religion of Jesus.**

**He died at Hampstead, the 11th of November, 1829,
in the 80th year of his age.**

Ossibus ossa meis et nomen nomine tangam.

FINIS.

ERRATA ET CORRIGENDA.

- Page 78, line 3, for, 'ensuing month,' read, *month of June*.
— 188, — 2, — 'Tayler,' read, *Taylor*.
— 213, — 12, — 'examination,' read, *investigation*.
— 226, — 19, — 'Belle,' read, *Belles*.
— 227, — 10 from the bottom, for 'two or three,' read, *two and three*.
— 231, — 8, dele 'how it.'
— 298, — 17, for, 'Cheekly,' read, *Checkly*.
— 470, — 10, — 'Socrates, Ecclesiastical,' read *Socrates' Ecclesiastical*.
— 472, — 9, — 'pretent,' read, *present*.
— 494, — 10 from the bottom, for, 'Lympson,' read *Lympston*.
— 549, — 4 ————— 'Ronald,' read, *Ronalds*.
— 556, — 19, for, 'Ronald,' read, *Ronalds*.
— 562, note, line 7 from the bottom, for 'Brodes,' read, *Brades*.
— 697, line 11, for 'Pickering,' read, *Pickard*.
— 704, — 18, — 'Eichorn,' read, *Eichhorn*.

In the note from Justin Martyr, Apolog. I. § 98, Thirlby's edit.

- line 2, for αὐτως, read, οὕτως.
—— — 3, — ἀνέμνησιν, read, ἀνάμνησιν.
— 724, last line, for, 'Eichorn,' read, *Eichhorn*.

A.D. 1829.]

776

[A.D. 80.]

**With them he devoted his life and talents
to revive and diffuse the knowledge of
the true religion of Jesus.**

He died at Hampstead, the 11th of November, 1829

G. SMALLFIELD, PRINTER, HACKNEY.



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DATE DUE

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